

THE
AMERICAN FUGITIVE:

OR,
Friendship in a Nunnery.

CONTAINING

A full Description of the Mode of Education
and Living in CONVENT SCHOOLS, both
on the low and high Pension;

THE
MANNERS and CHARACTERS of the NUNS;

The ARTS practised on YOUNG MINDS;

AND THEIR
BANEFUL EFFECTS on SOCIETY at large.

BY A LADY.

Those who to Convents fly, will sadly find,
That danger, vice, and woe of every kind,
Are surely met with there, not left behind.

L O N D O N:
PRINTED FOR A. POPE.

MDCC LXXXIV.

THE HISTORY OF THE

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BY A LADY



THE HISTORY OF THE

LONDON

PRINTED FOR A. POPE

IN DOCK LANE



T H E
AMERICAN FUGITIVE:

O R,

Friendship in a Nunnery,

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L E T T E R I.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

PARENTS have flinty hearts,—no tears can move them,—children must be wretched.

Yet who would have thought a woman of so fine an understanding, and so sentimental a turn, as my mother, was capable of shutting up an only child in a convent, *because*——what a libel on the maternal character!—because somewhat *taller* than girls of sixteen generally prove, and seeming, from that involuntary circumstance, to claim an introduction into the
B world,

world, of which *she* is so bright and capital an ornament.

Could not the *quality*, however, my beloved Nancy, atone for the *quantity*? Irregular features and a dowdy complexion are foils for beauty. But I beg her pardon : though married at ever so early a period, from the memento my *height* bore about, the malicious had some colour for their malice, and, instead of twenty-nine, the good lady's acknowledged age, might have insinuated that she was got on the wrong side thirty. But I will not trust myself farther on this subject, lest I forget I am a daughter.

You are anxious to know how I like my new situation. From the little judgment a four-and-twenty-hours observation enables me to form, I should pronounce this mansion a heaven upon earth : every thing around is so neat, so orderly, so elegant ; and the inhabitants are so gentle, so well bred, so soothing, and so agreeable. In a word, being a stranger to the joys, as they are called, of life, I cannot regret their loss ; and having my heart untouched, save by friendship, your company is all I can sigh for.

On this account I greatly lament the change in my mother's sentiments respecting your father. Had they made a match of it, your removal would have been found to the full as necessary as mine ; and we should, at least, have had the consolation of being banished together.

God forgive me for suspecting ! but I do suspect, that certain attentions the old gentleman's good-nature induced him to pay me in the course of his visits at our house, occasioned the

the double catastrophe of my exportation and his mistress's inconstancy.—“A fine promising girl—a pretty sort of young woman”——were his frequent epithets; which, *anglicised*, could not be very flattering to one who chose not to be deemed past her meridian.

My mother never once opened her designs upon me until we reached Dover; when, in the style of an eastern Bashaw, she signified to me, that it was her *will and pleasure* I should be placed for some two or three years in a religious house; that my *cheerful acquiescence* would be considered as a *mark of duty*; but that, whether I acquiesced or not, it was her will and pleasure, and must be complied with. I therefore made a virtue of necessity; and getting on board the packet early the next morning, four hours pleasant sailing brought us across the little strait called *le Pas de Calais*.

Calais, the town, my dear, which gives its name to, or receives it from, (for I am not clear which,) this strait, has very little to recommend it to the attention of travellers. It was taken, as you may read in the annals of your country, by Edward the Third, in 1347, after a siege of eleven months, and lost again by Mary, in 1557, in less than a fortnight: it is, however, of much consequence to the Grand Monarque, and guarded accordingly. It is chiefly inhabited by fishermen, is ill built, and only a passage-town to and from England.

Bologne, the next place at which we made a short stay, about seven leagues distant from Calais, stands on the river Lenart, which falls into the sea on the south of the town, and

forms a very convenient harbour. It is divided into upper and lower towns, both of which are well fortified ; and is a bishop's see, under the archbishop of Rheims. It was, it seems, the usual place of passage in the time of the Romans, and both Claudius and Caligula embarked from thence for Britain ; and it began to be called Bononié about the æra of Constantine the Great, who went through it in his way to York. Henry the Seventh of England reduced it to a very low condition ; but Charles the Eighth of France bought a peace, and preserved it. Our Harry the Eighth took it afterwards, in 1544, and kept it during his life-time ; but Edward the Sixth, in the disorders of his minority, sold or surrendered it to the French again for a much less sum than it cost the crown of England to conquer it.—And so much for Bologne.

Need I observe to you, that I have so long written on a subject foreign to every concern of my heart, *en badinage* ? for where the mind is disturbed, it is relief to fly as far as possible from our own thoughts.

But neither Calais nor Bologne are the places of my residence ; they were too near to the British shore for me to be set down in them : and my mother, I suppose, means, by hurrying me up into the interior parts of the country, to wean me from those local attachments which bend the inclinations towards a favourite spot. Be it as it may, however, here I am as much an English woman, and as much in love with England, as if I had never breathed the air of France ; nor do I believe it possible
for

for time or circumstance to give me new impressions or new propensities. My proper address is enclosed; and I cannot doubt your early acknowledgment of its safe arrival in London.

Adieu, my only friend! and be thankful with me, that, amidst all the peculiarities of our destiny, our innocent correspondence has not been interdicted. I own, I tremble lest the rigour of my sentence should have reached that distressing length; and cautiously avoided every mention of your name, from an apprehension of pulling down that, to me, greatest of human ills on my head; for my mother is despotic, and the sanctity of my word has never yet been violated. The rapidity of her movements prevented every possibility of a parting interview: but parting, Nancy, is at best a painful pleasure, and it is therefore with joy inexpressible that I feel myself at liberty to assure, and re-assure you, by my pen, how sincerely

I am, &c. &c. your own
MARIA GERRARD.

LETTER II.

From the Same to the Same.

I AM now set down to relieve my beloved friend from all her tender cares and fears respecting my happiness; which I am convinced I cannot more effectually do, than by giving
B 3 her

her a description of this mansion and its inhabitants.

The building appears to be remains, rather than ruins, of Roman architecture: it consists of a spacious hall in front, with an elegant parlour in each wing; the confessional has a view of the gardens; the chapel is fitted up in a magnificent style, with school-rooms, bed-chambers, and an amphitheatrical range of cells, of which I, at present, know not the use, with an Attic story that has a very pretty effect, and cloisters that lead to the choir, dormitory, and other necessary parts of this august dome.

The gardens are, moreover, extensive, and laid out in a taste peculiar to their use; for whether it is contemplation or air, retirement or society, that is the motive for walking in them, the wish is gratified, and the satisfaction general and heart-felt.

As for the Superior, she is the best-bred woman I ever met with, and in her day must have been a first-rate beauty: her lessons, therefore, on the vanity of personal charms, fall with inconceivable grace from her lips, and silence the most secret murmurings of that passion, which renders youth impatient to *see* and *be seen*. She was, I have learnt, destined by her family and her own inclinations for the wife of a young officer in the French service, who fell in an engagement by a generous but unsuccessful effort to save her father's life; and this misfortune so detached her mind from earthly concerns, that she sought and found an asylum in this mansion, the mansion of innocence and peace;

peace; and is a living testimony of the true painting contained in Pope's elegant lines,

*"How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot,
The world forgetting, by the world forgot,"* &c.

Her appearance and behaviour have indeed inspired me with very unusual sentiments of religious houses, against which you know we received some fearful prejudices: and was you, my Nancy, but added to the society, I am positive I could live and die with pleasure in a convent.

The rules of this house are strict, and, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, invariable: early rising and early meals, with stated intervals of reading, industry, exercise, and devotion; which you will grant me is no unpleasant round. But take notice, I speak only of the way those on the high pension fill up their time; for such as, from a penurious temper, or the real necessities of their circumstances, place their daughters on the *low* pension, had much better keep them in England: they acquire a facility of speaking French, 'tis true, but not the pure or correct language; and are accommodated in a different style, both as to their eating and sleeping, from those on the *high*, though they pay only a few pounds less a year: they are also excluded totally from the knowledge of what passes, and all intercourse with the interior parts of the convent; never enter the parlours, or in any respect become the immediate objects of the Superior's care; but are, in fact, considered in much the same

light with our half boarders in England, who scratch up their learning as they can.

There are a number of handsome nuns who attend in our upper school, and voluntarily perform offices your teachers in Britain would think beneath the *dignity* of their characters; besides which, I am told, they impose heavy penances on themselves at certain seasons, from the extravagant persuasion that works of supererogation will be registered on high, and tell in at the great day of account.

Methinks it would be entertaining to hear the relation, from their own mouths, of the *whys* and *wherefores* which induced them to a recluse life; but the conversations the scholars are indulged in with this superior order of beings is only during the school hours, and under the eye of a female *intendant* or deputy Lady Abbess: no intimacy, therefore, or confidential narratives, can be hoped for, or indeed entered into. It is, nevertheless, not impossible, as we have a mixture of all nations under the sun, on the same terms, and nearly the same age with myself, that I may be enabled to present you some smaller dishes, worthy your acceptance, from a cloister.

I have had a letter from my mother, full of encomiums on the felicity of my situation:—exempt from care; secure from folly; and out of the reach of danger.—Ah, my dear Madam! however just your conjectures may be they are only conjectures on your part, and too precarious a foundation, surely, on which to build your child's peace and safety.—Do you not, moreover, hazard her religion? for
allurements

allurements are not wanting, though verbal persuasion is omitted.—Yet no matter—in your opinion, I suppose, it will be a good thing, if your daughter finds her way to heaven at last, though she should happen to pursue a contrary road to the one you pointed out to her, and have travelled through yourself.—But I have done, Nancy, and will learn obedience to the parental mandate.

The mode of living in religious houses, is, as I have already hinted, by no means what you giddy fluttering people of the world conceive it; for “the feast of reason and the flow of soul” are not unenjoyed within their walls: music, dancing, and polite authors, are the alternate and familiar objects, or, if you please, sources of our amusement. We, indeed, have no men amongst us, but we say the prettiest things imaginable to each other; have our emulations, our favouritisms, our parties, in like manner with you.—But more of this hereafter.

I am in a course of Voiture, and think his letters the standard of epistolary excellence; his raillery is so delicate, his sentiments so just, his language so elegant, his turns so pleasant: no wonder, then, I read him with delight, or recommend him to you as a most amiable and accomplished writer.

I have not adopted the French style of dressing; but, as nature and fancy are unfettered here, am become, as far as exterior reaches, an Arcadian nymph: for my hair flows negligently about my shoulders; my jacket and petticoat are prettily trimmed with ribbon; my

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red slippers and my *bouquet* compleat me, *tout-à-fait*, the daughter of simplicity: nor is any thing but beauty wanting to make me a striking and engaging figure. As I must, however, despair of your being hence able to form an adequate idea of the merits of my appearance, even with all my disadvantages on my head, I am now sitting to one of the sisterhood, who has a happy pencil, for my picture, and shall in a short time pay you a visit in *crayons*, to your equal surprize and satisfaction; or you are not the good girl I take you for.—Alas, Nancy! my heart tells me, from its own sensations, that you are only too tenderly my friend for your repose in our present state of cruel separation.

Adieu, adieu,

MARIA.

L E T T E R III.

From the Same to the Same.

YOUR prophecy, my dear girl, is yet unfulfilled: it is not the surface alone that is smooth, but the utmost depths are unruffled. Peace, in all her varied, her delightful shapes, has fixed her abode within these walls; and joy and love, and every soft and amiable passion, are insensibly excited, animated, exalted by her.

You know I never was a gadfly either by nature or education; therefore feel it no difficult

cult task to confine my views, my schemes, my wishes, except where you are concerned, to the limits prescribed me. Instead of sharp lectures, or painful self-denials, which were frequently given me, and demanded from me, when under the parental roof, I here meet with nothing but commendation, sociality, and smiling countenances: nor do I believe I shall ever experience a change, contrary as your declared opinion is to that I entertain. In the world, Nancy, people are good by starts, as it were, and perform the duties of their characters as *duties* only: here the heart takes the lead, and every prejudice, every selfish partiality, flies before it; it measures others feelings by its own, the necessities, the delicacies of their situations; and to do as they would be done by, is the universal tenor of conduct.

The life and manners so unimpeachable, are, I conceive, the reason why the solemnity in their mode of worship strikes my mind with a religious awe and pleasure I never experienced in our churches; every one appears so perfectly in *earnest*, so unfeignedly convinced of the divine presence, as promised to all congregations that are sincere in their devotions, and the priests seem so immediately the deputies of the Most High, that an unbidden sympathy steals me from myself, and I am, as it were, inspired with supernatural faith, gratitude, and reverence.

But be not alarmed: the freedom of the will is not so much as attempted to be invaded; no subject is started to disturb, or raise a single doubt;

doubt ; and I ever considered those who abandoned the tenets in which they were educated, as having no religion at all.

O Nancy, that it was but possible for us to spend our lives together ! I cannot form an idea of higher felicity than strolling side by side through these beautiful gardens, observing the mechanical propriety which prevails around, or drinking tea with a woman I almost deify both for person and mind. It would be a feast to you to see our Superior, and an exquisite pleasure to me to hear your sentiments on all these matters, or reasons for dissenting from me, if dissent you could, in a single particular.

I am making an acquaintance with an English gentlewoman, the widow of a captain, who has retired here on her little pension. She is barely my mother's age ; but loving the memory of the man she married beyond every thing in existence, she resolved to seek a situation where, without ridicule or singularity, she might devote herself to such contemplations as suited best the colour of her mind, and where her small stipend would give her independence.

She is much esteemed by the Superior and all the assistant nuns ; but is reserved, and seldom chuses to mix in those parties where conviviality, however innocent, is the object. She speaks so handsomely of her husband, who died of the small-pox, that it is plain he merited all her regard, and that her regret is heart-felt : he was sensible, learned, lively, and engaging, and only thirty-two when he
was

was cut off by this cruel disease.—She is however, only a boarder, never attends mass, nor, I am told, has once opened her lips on religion since she entered the convent: but the feature in her character which binds me most to her, is, Nancy, her having had a daughter that shared her tenderness, and lived to be twelve years old, for whose sake she would cheerfully have submitted to brave the difficulties of a bad world: and by every expression she uses when this daughter is mentioned, I am satisfied her mind is of that amiable cast Mr. Pope marks in the following lines,

*“She that can love a sister’s charms, and bear
Sighs for a daughter with unwounded ear.”*

I am aware how naturally we revert to the point that touches us the nearest; but my mother’s neglect is the barbed arrow I bear about with me, and I have not the gift of suffering without complaint: so you must forgive and pity me; for am I not your, &c. &c.

MARIA?

LETTER IV.

From the Same to the Same.

MY dear, sweet, prejudiced girl, can you be seriously and gravely alarmed for the state of your friend’s soul, or weakly think a conformity to such or such forms the essence of Christianity?—I blush for you, and, for the honor

honor of both, intreat you will make a speedy and public renunciation of your error.—Are there not heathens, my dear, in the protestant, if there are hypocrites in the catholic church?

—But here lies the difference between the two characters: the protestant sins against his own convictions, without hope or belief of any human propitiation; the catholic, with an intention to confess, do penance, and purge his soul from its offences immediately after the commission of them, when all, you know, is well again. I could give you chapter and verse for your absurdity, but I spare you, and may your own good sense detect, convict, and punish you.

I this morning, for the first time, took notice of a little girl, who, they tell me, weeps incessantly for the distresses of her native country, and is thence distinguished all over the convent by the name of Niobe. She is, Nancy, a young American.

I said a few civil things in order to qualify the familiarity of my address to a stranger, and besought her to tell me how her heart came by its very uncommon sensibility for her tender years. “Ah! Madam! replied she emphatically, my feelings have been awakened, quickened by scenes of misery, such as, I hope, neither you nor any of your friends will ever experience.”

I thanked her for her pretty compliment, and asked her to drink tea with me, which is served up every day for the English ladies in the Refectory, where they sip it in small or large

large parties, according to the prevailing humour of the company.

On farther enquiry, I find she is turned of fourteen, but very little of her age, and has a memory and understanding far beyond all example. I was impatient for the appointed hour, as I flattered myself the innocent and intelligent prattle of this young stranger would soothe and soften the pangs of absence from the friend of my heart. She was punctual, and her eyes spoke too plainly how she had passed the intermediate time.

“ Still weeping, my lovely little visitor, said I; such patriotic tears are seldom shed, and may they not be shed in vain !”

“ You must not rally, Madam, though you do it so agreeably; for, young as I am, I have substantial cause: for besides the general calamities of a country I love, a father and mother, the most tender and affectionate on earth, have been torn from me; they sent me under the care of a French lady to this place of *imagined* safety, but are themselves become fugitives, wanderers without home or habitations, whilst I am unknowing even of their personal exemption from torture or death—but I see, continued she, I have already taught you a new lesson.” “ What is that, my dear ?” “ Pity, generous pity, Madam.” I tapped her cheek, and my eyes insensibly moistening, she kissed my hand, and intreated, in the sweetest terms, I would not let her misfortunes touch me too nearly. “ I would interest you, Madam, for I feel I shall love you; but I must not afflict you.”

I enquired

I enquired how her family came to be so singularly unfortunate as to fall almost the first sacrifice on the Continent, and found they lived on the spot where the opposition began ; and Mr. Smith, having served under General Wolf, was an immediate object of suspicion and hatred, and, as such, hunted down by that set of people that always take advantage of civil commotions to cover their own villainy and barbarity. Previous, however, to this act of violence and outrage, the little Niobe was embarked, by the care and caution of her kind parents, for France ; but heard the melancholy tidings from a packet that overtook her in crossing the Atlantic, which plunged her into the deepest affliction.

She professes the most loyal attachment to the Sovereign, but inveighs heavily against ministerial pride, and ministerial tyranny, which, she insists upon it, incited the crown to tax the Americans in a manner the most repugnant to their true interests, and the least suited to their tempers. Hence their honest resistance ; hence their reasonable and humble petition to be represented by men who knew the nature of the country and its commercial policy ; and hence the opposition to the misrule of bad Ministers, which had been so fatally construed into disaffection for the King, and branded with the name of rebellion. " Judge then, Madam, added she, of the source of my tears, and tell me, if they must not ever flow with those of numbers of other undone families, whose losses can never be repaired, and whose sorrows can never be done away."

I sincerely

I sincerely sympathized with her, and soothed her to the best of my abilities, bidding her trust better days awaited her; and we have promised to spend as much of our time together, as the nature of our situations will admit. Ah! my Nancy, how little are the miseries of war conceived by those who enjoy the invaluable blessings of peace—widows and fatherless overwhelmed with woe; famine, bloodshed, carnage marking the steps of the conqueror; and captivity, or death, the only portion of the conquered, plundered, driven out. Oh! ye men of power, when will ye be merciful? Ye men of counsel, when will ye be wise? Remember, before it is too late, your own property, reputation, and safety, are at stake; nor can you undo without being undone.

My little attentions to this pleasing girl have so won her young heart, that she laments I was not born in America. “Your benevolence, your humanity, Madam, would have done honor to my beloved country, where strangers are received with open arms, find a home in every house, a friend in every honest individual, and a protector in all around. Merit in my country never languishes in obscurity, or passes unrewarded. The question is not asked *who* people are, but *what* they are; not what were their fathers fame and fortune, but what are their own principles and abilities: and every one is eager to support, encourage, and establish them accordingly. Marriages in America are not made up by bargain and sale; the wife pays no price for her husband,
nor

nor has the husband an idea of purchasing his wife: the temper, the beauty, the good sense, the valor, the wisdom, the good nature of the parties, are the charms which attract, the treasures which invite; and the whole continent is before them to make their fortunes in."

—But she is a little enthusiast, and I will not be her proselyte. By her account, the manners, taste, and heart, are uncorrupted in America—the true happiness of our nature and reason understood, and pursued, by its inhabitants. From the specimen she herself indeed presents of this fairy land, I could almost, I own to you, be in love with it, with the olive branch restored, and to be wasted to its shore; but not unless you was to accompany me, though all the youths were Adonis's, and all the maidens Niobe's: for are we not already at too great a distance, and without the prospect, tho' the vast Atlantic rolls not between us, of being re-united? This recollection cools my transports, and brings me back to subscribe myself,

Your, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER V.

From the Same to the Same.

"**S**TILL harping on my daughter!" Yet religion, my dear friend, though most strictly practised, is the least talked of in this house,

house, of all the houses I was ever in. And moreover, our Priest is a man advanced in years, of sober demeanour, and most exemplary piety. He gives me his blessing *en passant* every morning and evening, and I, in return, compliment him with one of my best curtsies; and, on my honor, that is the extent of our intercourse.

You desire me to remember an observation, made by a great writer, the force of which I feel and subscribe to, namely, that, in a convent, all the *returns* of the heart are to the *world*; in the world, to God. But weariness alone gives birth to repentance, and how can weariness of soul take place in a mansion where there is a constant succession of pleasing *employments*, through eighteen out of twenty-four hours? For my own part, except where you are concerned, I have not known an interval of lassitude or discontent since I entered its walls.

Here is a young lady, whose noviciate expires next week, that is so lovely a figure, I cannot help thinking her a lively image of the beauty of holiness. I have endeavoured more than once to engage her notice; but she is cold and insensible to every earthly overture, and seems already a saint of the highest order. The ceremony of her taking the veil will I am told, be superb, as she is of one of the greatest families in France, now barely sixteen, and becomes a nun from voluntary election. I shall not fail to be a spectator on the occasion.

Observe,

Observe, I do not indulge the idea, but it sometimes strikes me, that no mortal has more inducements to quit the world than myself: a kind of orphan, dependent as to fortune, bound by no tie but that of friendship, and forbid the enjoyment of that only friend my infant heart ever acknowledged. I again, however, beseech you to observe, that it is a thought which comes casually across my mind, and is wholly discountenanced by reason, and uncherished by the passions.

The Superior caught me the other morning in a musing attitude. "Beware, my child, said she, of melancholy; it will impose on your understanding, and mislead your heart: seek, much rather than shun, your agreeable companions—participate all their rational, their elegant amusements—vie with them in every innocent contest for superiority, and yield to none in mental excellence. Nature has been bountiful to you; your capacity is ample, your disposition docile, your mind well turned, cloud not, then, your perfections by gloom or ill-humour; purity of soul always gilds the features with gladness. Smile, my love, and be yourself again."

I blushed, and went immediately into *our* parlour; for there is no replying to this wonderful woman on certain subjects. On my entrance, I found a little dispute had arisen, between my Niobe and a Scotch boarder, on the question of loyalty, and that their nationality had carried them great lengths.

"In what king's reign, said Niobe, (her tears suspended by indignation,) were the
Scotch

Scotch considered as loyal subjects to the House of Brunswic? Did they not rebel against George the First and Second, for the declared purpose of dethroning them? And what oppressions did they sustain, what provocations receive, to urge them to the attempt?

“ James, the Sixth of Scotland, and First of England, their natural Prince, united the two crowns, and the supremacy was lodged in England. Queen Anne, a Stewart likewise, united the two kingdoms, and imposed every yoke that galled them; yet as the advantages of the Union were abundant, they cheerfully acquiesced, until the present family, under the act of settlement; succeeded to the British throne, when they were soon in the field against their Sovereign.—Defeated, pardoned, how long did they remain peaceable? Only till they collected new strength. But though a second time vanquished and confounded, instead of being branded with the name of traitors, every latitude was given them to retrieve their lost reputation.

“ My countrymen were actuated by far different motives; they sought only to convince the King they loved, that his ministers were *deceived* or *deceiving*, and to avert an evil their shoulders were unable to sustain. This was the spark which the Scotch soon blew into a flame: it was flying in the face of *Majesty*, to arraign the wisdom of the *Minister*—and whitening all at once by our side, we, poor Americans, with English hearts in our bosoms, and English blood in our veins, were proclaimed rebels. Scotchmen surrounded the throne

throne—Long live the *power*, the *will* of royalty, was the word—until the pleadings of parental tenderness were borne down—and two thirds of the British troops, reluctant, sent forth to slaughter their brothers, and chastise the conduct they secretly applauded.—Hence all the Scotch fugitives got into office, (the navy and army saving them from famine and drudgery,) and with sword in hand, as every bad woman is said to hunt down a betrayed innocent, advanced to *scourge* us into subjection. But the true point of pity and ridicule is, that the Americans were represented to the Sovereign as an ignorant, feeble race, who would fly before a handful of British soldiers: the bravery and resolution with which they fought under the English banner, during the last war, was wholly forgotten.—Hear these truths, said the little Niobe—hear my wrongs, cried she, bursting into tears, now that her rage had spent itself—and learn to revere a nation that will teach you, though sorely against their wishes—no human power shall oppress them with *impunity*.”

Her spirit, her eloquence, her sensibility, drew the chief of her audience over to her party. I own, I embraced her; and forgetting at what price the victory must be purchased, sincerely wished her countrymen might be victorious.

She insisted upon it, in her cooler moments, that the tea act was obtained by the dint of *East-India Gold*—and that, in order to gratify a small body of men, the whole American continent, under a Scotch administration, would

would be the sacrifice.—I am not politician sufficient either to controvert or ascertain the truth of her assertion; but judging by the rules of reason and common sense, I should think it impossible such men could be entrusted with the care of the British empire, as are unable to distinguish between the value of a peppercorn and such a country as America.

Come, my Nancy, and take sanctuary from a bad world under this celestial roof: one half of the community are knaves, and three fifths of the other moiety fools. Come, then, and sit down with me in retirement and innocence, before the calamities of war spread themselves such lengths as to impede your passage. The sweet Niobe is impatient to kiss your hands: Mrs. Ashley, the widow already introduced to your acquaintance by my pen, ardently longs to see you. You will find a little army of friends to rejoice in your arrival and demonstrate to you, that goodness to goodness is a natural attraction, and that the complexion of the soul is unaltered by the air of a convent. Come, then I repeat; nor let me, for the only time in my life, solicit a favour from you in vain.

I am, &c. &c. MARIA.

LETTER VI.

From the Same to the Same.

A Letter from my mother! Yes, Nancy, the hand-writing and the signature are hers; but judge, by this specimen, how much
of

of the maternal character there is in the language.

She tells me, she has now a most advantageous offer, which she believes she shall accept; and that though my father, from excess of tenderness, and in order to make it my interest to be dutiful, left my provision wholly at her mercy, she will not fail, previous to her change of condition, to vest a sum in the hands of trustees, as a portion for me, if I marry with her approbation, or a handsome support, if I choose to continue in my present situation; that my own good sense will point out to me the impropriety of taking a *tall* girl under her protection, whose head and heart are liable to be turned by the vanities of life, when she has pledged herself at the altar to make the happiness of her husband the sole object of her attention; and therefore recommends it to me, to make my election, and let her receive my speedy answer.

Answer! my dear Nancy; what answer can she expect? If Fame says true, five-and-twenty thousand pounds was the sum my father left behind him; and the pittance I have to hope for—but let me not dishonour his memory, by an impatience under his pleasure: the property was his own, and he had a right to bestow it where and how he liked best: he gave it to my mother, and she is kind to remember I have any claim to consideration. I will, therefore, request her to appoint me a little certainty, that may place me above want, either within these walls, or in some happy retreat in England—far, far from polite or busy

ty scenes ; for they and I are finally separated.

When I read my mother's letter, the gentle Niobe shed tear for tear with me, without knowing the cause of my distress. She then asked me, like poor Lear, from a disturbed imagination, if I had not some beloved friend or relation in America ; “ for all other misfortunes, added she, are light and trivial, compared to those my country labours under.”

I assured her that was not the case ; and, effectually to relieve her doubts, put the *maternal* epistle I had perused into her hand. Her colour changed several times whilst she ran over its contents, as surprise, pity, or honest indignation, predominated.—“ We have no such mothers, said she, in America ; my countrywomen, Madam, are tried, and alone approved worthy as they best acquit themselves in that tender character. Oh ! why was you not an American !—But the soul, continued she, is of no particular nation, and claims its kindred soul wherever it finds it. I wish I had a brother, that could ask your acceptance of him—or—(then weeping)—alas ! who knows if I have one dear relation left ; though to soothe your sorrows I can so wantonly forget my own. Will you, Madam, by your friendship, supply to me, as far as possible, all my lost family.—Will you always allow me access to your heart, cheer me by your compassion, guard me by your advice, and keep me from despair !”

Mrs. Ashley, perceiving us much affected, begged leave to join us—“ Curiosity, my young
C friends,

friends, is a motive you can never impute to such a mind as mine. It is my concern at seeing two such amiable bosoms the prey of affliction, that induces me to break in upon you, to tell you, that you feel every disappointment, every evil from your inexperience, with tenfold weight to the reality. Calamity is the common inheritance of existence, and teaches us a lesson prosperity never so much as hints at; namely, that it is not in this world we are to fix our everlasting abode; but that youth, beauty, honours, as well as age, disease and misery, alike lead on to the grave, where all things can alone be equally and permanently adjusted."

I communicated my cause of grief, and received much consolation from the light in which her good sense placed it; but her sentiments and yours, notwithstanding the difference of your years, are so perfectly correspondent, that I need not commit them to paper. And we promised her, in the conclusion, to submit ourselves and our affairs to providence, whose designs are most excellent, and their ultimatum our eternal happiness, however discordant to our mortal inclinations: nor will the little Niobe, if she can help it, weep again.

Yet such, Nancy, is my ungovernable spirit, that I can scarcely forbear expostulating with heaven, why susceptibilities were given me, that are my torment. Many young girls are as indifferent about their mothers, as my mother is indifferent about her child; but I should have delighted in being approved, guided, countenanced by the author of my existence,

quently tampered with ; but that she always flies out at a rate which is by no means pleasing to her tempters ; and they tell her, in plain terms, they now leave her to be undone her own way. She moreover insists upon it, there is nothing but *masters* and *mistresses* of arts within these walls, and that the *mode* of attack is suited to the taste, capacity, and mental constitution of the party ; and that, however I may deceive myself, *filken nets* are spread for me, in which she fears my passions will be entangled, though my reason and conscience should make ever such powerful resistance. Nay, the sly, quick-discerning girl, goes so far as to charge me with being already a down right idolater ; for, she says, she can perceive my heart does homage to the crucifix every time it meets my eye.

We may fancy what we please, she asserts ; but the passions are wonderfully within the power of externals, and are composed or ruffled by them at will : as a proof of which she tells a story the nuns entertained her with, on her first arrival in the convent, in order to reconcile her to the sin of idolatry, and which she conceives ought to awaken me to a perception of my danger, and put me on my guard.

She had, it seems, spoke her dislike of the pictures before which the people of this house bow the knee, and boldly advised them to shut out every object of sense, and let their hearts bend to the unseen God.

In reply to this, they declared to her, they in no degree worshipped the paintings, but only set them before them to touch and inter-

rest their minds, and keep them from all wanderings ; and that the mind was capable of being fixed or agitated, by the representation of a beloved, as well as a feared object, was clear from the following incident :

A gentleman, that had long combated this point, happened to attend some company (amongst the number of which was a holy father, who had his eternal welfare much at heart) over his house, to shew them the improvements and additions he had made since their last visit ; when coming to one particular apartment, he changed colour, stopped, and begged to be excused entering it—for that the picture of his dead son was there, and he was beyond measure distressed whenever he beheld it. The holy father, turning instantly upon him, said, “ And why, Sir, if a canvas, representing the features of your departed and beloved son, can so greatly move you—why will you not consent to aid your devotions by the representation of *his* sufferings who died that you might live, and whose agonies were the price of your salvation ? ” The gentleman was overcome, and from that time forward always prayed in the true letter and spirit of the Romish church.

I waited for her inference ; for, to tell you the truth, the little relation had made a deep impression on my mind, insomuch that I secretly determined to warm my religious zeal before a crucifix, however I might continue to disapprove the practice of addressing the saints.

“ You make no comments, said she, in her pretty way, on this idle tale ; and perhaps I have done harm where I sought to do good :

good : but, my dear Madam, do not deceive yourself; for though you may set out with ever such clear distinctions in your head, you would insensibly lose them, and, instead of looking up to the heaven of heavens for the object of your prayers or praises, sink into the actual worshipper of images made with hands, imagined likenesses of the Deity, as suggested by our finite capacities, and thus degrade the King of Kings, while you flattered yourself you was paying him the purest adoration."

I send you thus much of our conversation, to satisfy you that I am still under a friendly and watchful eye; and as the urchin has found means to come at the knowledge of your address, I doubt not but she would inform you by letter, if she thought me in any real or immediate danger of being *perverted*, as she calls the being made a proselyte.

The whole convent is busy in preparations for the solemnity I mentioned to you, and the young lady's countenance is lighted up with uncommon graces—the graces of divine love and divine resignation.

So curious am I become in all matters that relate to what is deemed, in this house, the most grateful of all human offerings to heaven, that I would give an ear to know what incited so lovely a creature, in the pride and bloom of life, to fly from splendor and adulation into a convent. This, Nancy, must be holy inspiration; and, though no enthusiast (as Mrs. Ashley insinuates), I cannot forbear adopting the general opinion, that she is in a most peculiar manner the child, the elect child of

heaven: for it is not love, that disease of young minds, nor disappointed ambition, the corroding anguish of aspiring minds, nor faded charms, the poison of vain minds, nor disgust, that warper of gloomy minds, which has prompted her to this blessed election. Health, beauty and content, glow on her cheek; the lustre of innocence animates her eye: yet, in a few days, she seals her covenant with her God, and surely for her, if for any devotee,

—“*The priest prepares the bridal ring,
For her white virgins hymeneals sing:
For her th’ unfading rose of Eden blooms,
And wings of seraphs shed divine perfumes.*”

This fight will pay me for all the mortifications my mother’s conduct has cost me, and for the time even suspend the regret I feel in being separated from you: for, ah! my dear girl, what has the world to give, that is worth a moment’s ambition, or one weak sigh. For my part, I actually despise (as Thompson phrases it)

“*Its pomp, its folly, and its nonsense all.*”

and, though I cannot be a nun, I am resolved to spend the remainder of my days as near as possible to the perfection of piety exhibited within these walls by a happy multitude, who have acquired the power of subduing every wild and idle desire, and have exchanged the fleeting, unsatisfactory pleasures of time, for the never-ending felicities of eternity.

Adieu, &c. &c.

MARIA.
LETTER

L E T T E R VIII.

From the Same to the Same.

MY fate is now determined, and an annuity of sixty pounds a year, the interest of two thousand pounds, my dear, is ascertained to me beyond revocation or recal. Well ! sixty pounds a year, with the turn of mind I possess, is better than sixty times the sum with a rage for dissipation. Ah ! my friend, it cannot be concealed ; the decisive blow is given, and we must part for—ever !

If the religion professed in this house has its errors, it has its perfections likewise : fastings, self-examinations, are continually bringing back the wandering heart ; and though mortality must be frail, it is impossible under such regulations, to be a hardened sinner.

I have seen a sight that men and angels must behold with rapture : the beautiful young creature is now become a holy sister, and her affections, her person, devoted to the author of her existence.

I saw the divine transports of her soul when she approached the altar ; heavenly fire sparkled in her eyes ; she pronounced the awful words that cut her off from society with unshaken accents, and retired never more to view, to wish for, or even think of, the world again.

I have had some conversation with our Superior, who advises me to consider well what I am about, nor mistake disgust of any kind for

holy zeal, or the admiration of a convent for the dislike of the world. She observed, that sincerity and truth are the demanded offerings; and that those, who hastily throw themselves into the kind, ever peaceful arms of a cloister, and repent, not only deceive mankind, but hourly offend *him* from whom no secrets are hid. How unlike this behaviour to every thing I expected ! Instead of precipitating me, she begged me to deliberate ; and, instead of dazzling my youthful imagination with pictures of peculiar felicity under her roof, assured me it was the most important step of my life, and could not be taken with too much caution or reflection.

The little Niobe, who, I think is every where, met me just as I quitted the parlour, and, regarding me for a moment, was not at a loss to guess the motive of my visit.

“ Is it possible, then, cried she, that your good sense can be so taken in !—but God forgive those who have so long laboured to warp such a mind as yours. Alas ! what is it you seek for in this house that the world cannot give you ?—Retirement is every where in your power, if retirement is your choice ; and you may indulge yourself in devotion, even to the highest pitch of enthusiasm, if devotion has such abundant charms for you, without tying yourself up to either the one or the other. If you can distrust your resolution, you are doing a wicked thing ; repentant tears pollute the cheeks of a nun, and pull down vengeance instead of salvation, on her head.—You should see what I see, and your heart would be sufficiently

ficiently hardened : not a scholar in the place but returns to their friends either *confirmed* catholics, or without one principle of any religion in their bosoms—the arts which are practised operate like a slow poison, and the mind is *lost* before we are sensible it is *infected*.

But whatever appearance of truth there may be in this well-meaning girl's representations, do I not know, there is little reality in them—What attempts have been made on me?—Do I not behold every countenance serene?—Does that bespeak repentance, though years have passed away since they broke hands with the world? And that their religious zeal is in no degree abated, their behaviour at chapel undeniably evinces.

Besides, my mother, dissatisfied as I may be with some parts of her conduct, is still my mother; and I am certain I shall fulfil the first wish of her heart, by fixing myself in a state from whence there is no return. Every thing has conspired to lead me to this choice—the world's frowns, the convent's smiles—the world's folly, the convent's wisdom—the world's danger, the convent's safety: then confess, Nancy, the work of Providence, nor dare to repine at its decrees.

I have consulted my soul, and find I can, without the most secret self-reproach, draw near the awful throne; my heart is empty, save of you and God; and friendship is an emanation of the divinity, and must purify, not stain, the bosom it inhabits.

I have a great notion my little busy friend is now, pen in hand, pouring forth her generous
anxiety

anxiety for me, on paper, for your p rusal — receive her letter, then, as the effusions of a tender, apprehensive, but misjudging spirit, and pay small regard to the descriptions it contains.—She has strong feelings, consequently strong prejudices; a lively fancy, therefore an aptness for painting things in their highest colourings: and the Americans, I have moreover discovered, bring up their children in an absolute abhorrence of the catholic religion, and, in the wildness of their zeal, condemn its purities, because it has, perhaps, some errors.

But, my Nancy, the fact is this: the catholic religion was the religion established by the Prince of Peace, the Saviour of Mankind, the religion propagated by his holy Apostles, the true and original bishops of the church, and was the universal religion of christianity from the first to the fifteenth century, when a man of a contentious, turbulent, and ambitious temper, set up for a reformer, on principles still more censurable, apocryphal, and absurd, than those he professed to explode.

Such as were fond of novelty eagerly embraced his new-fangled tenets; and such as professed a similar obstinacy of mind with the little Niobe, died, rather than renounce their recently-adopted faith.

Henry the Eighth, on the *noble* basis of offended pride, and disappointed love, raised the superstructure of Protestantism. He had obtained, only a few years before, the addition of *Defender of the Faith*, for a book he had written in refutation of heterodox opinions; but no sooner was his licentious eye cast on his
brother's

brother's wife, and the holy church had refused its sanction to such unhallowed nuptials, than he abjured the papal dominion, and became at once a protestant and the violator of his deceased brother's bed.

His conscience, nevertheless, at the end of twenty years, betrayed its genuine complexion—the protestant King had seen the beautiful Anna Bullen, and he immediately, by his own power and authority, for he had no pope to regulate his conduct, or restrain his vices, divorced himself from the woman he had married in defiance of the holy mandate; and so proceeded on in one uninterrupted course of hypocrisy, blood and iniquity, to his sixth wife,—but, take notice, was all the time a good protestant sovereign at the heart.

Had he not publicly and openly quarrelled with the father of the church, the catholic church would have borne the whole reproach of his crimes, indulgencies would have been said to have been granted, dispensations purchased, and absolution sold for a price—but mark, my Nancy, he was a protestant, a declared, an established protestant, during the horrid period of his horrid practices.—Would to heaven this circumstance might enlighten your mind, as it has done mine, and that you may become a *true* christian.

I am, with all possible affection,
yours, &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

L E T T E R IX.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

Dear Madam,

MY motive will plead my excuse for the liberty I now take with you : — the amiable Miss Gerrard is on the point of renouncing the world, and you ; for I know it will be demanded of her, as a sacrifice to her God, to break through every tender connection that would hold her, as they call it, on the argument of life.

As for me, I am an outcast, and the mark of perdition is set upon me, because I am not to be moulded to their will—have my senses seduced, my understanding laid asleep, and my heart rendered the dupe of the blackest artifice ever practised by the blackest magician in fabulous writ. But I will, if you please, tell you my strong holds, my infallible security against all their wiles.

In America I have seen instances of vice and uncharitableness in people of this religion, that the very savages would blush to be guilty of—yet, *Who's afraid?* is their motto—the priest is ready with an absolution ; and though, perhaps, the first sinner himself, impiously professes a power of taking away the sins of others.

You have, Madam, heard the story of my misfortunes and the melancholy chance which threw me into this seminary of deceit. I have not the softness of nature which is our deluded friend's characteristic ; therefore resist where
she

the yields, despise all their attempts to enslave my freedom of choice, and laugh at every human testimony of the marvellous.

I was scarcely recovered from the fatigues of my passage across the Atlantic, before they put a book (a *Legendary* I think it was called) into my hands, wherein was registered such gross absurdities, that I found to become a catholic I must offer up my common-sense on the shrine of superstition. I therefore returned it, with a sufficient comment on its contents to inform them the perusal of it had left me as faithless as it found me.

I was then led to chapel, where the full organ, accompanying glorious Hosannas, is apt to steal away the soul; but I had the happiness to remember, in the midst of this bewitching solemnity, that prophane lips were uttering the divinest things, and, that instead of an angelic congregation, I was mixed with deceivers, and vain pretenders to supernatural sanctity, and supernatural endowments.

In the school I perceived the creatures of the convent *fine-drawing* the minds of the innocent and credulous:—I perceived that those who were most startled in the first instance at the idea of exchanging the religion of their parents and country for the religion of the convent, became, by proper management, the warmest of all enthusiasts. I perceived that every feeling of nature was struck at, and that to be the child of God, in their construction of the words, I must break through every moral, every tender tie, and cease to love the father and mother I *had* seen; tho' the Bible affirms,

affirms, that, if we love not the parents we *have* seen, we cannot love our heavenly father whom we have *not* seen.—Hence I was convinced it was degrading, if not insulting, the Deity, to do as they required; for that it was at once to rob him of his beautiful attribute mercy, and set bounds to his benevolence, who is the soul of the creation, the fountain of love, and the universal protector of his creatures; or, as Mr. Pope sweetly describes it,

*“ All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul,
That, chang’d thro’ all, and yet thro’ all the same,
Great in the earth, as in the etherial frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,
Lives thro’ all life, extends thro’ all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent,
Breathes in our souls, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect in a hair as heart,
As full as perfect in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns:
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all.”*

Forgive me, Madam, that I have run through my favourite quotation; but, if I may be allowed the expression, it is the little Niobe’s creed, and she wished you neither to lose one word of it, or to have the trouble of referring to your library, when your care of your friend ought, from her critical situation, to be your only object.

From this turn of mind, which my ever
dear

dear and reverend father and mother took pains to cultivate, it would, according to their legendary, be much easier for them to remove mountains into the midst of the sea, than to make me a profelyte.

Miss Gerrard had been some time in the convent before she did me the honor to take notice of me;—but my busy and whimsical spirit put me early on studying her temper and character—for I cannot, Madam, always weep, lest melancholy should seize me. I unbend by every means in my power, and have much pleasure in getting acquainted with the heart, by the lights held forth in the countenance of those I am cast amongst. Miss Gerrard, who is all purity and truth herself, is unhappily persuaded that purity and truth dwell within these walls—Alas! Madam, how little does she know of its inhabitants! Numbers of the most worthless women, worn out in the public eye, or broke down by disease, retire here on small annuities, and close a life of licentiousness by a mockery of penitence.

These are the saints, these the angels on earth you are liable to form friendships with in a convent; their manners are often engaging, their address insinuating, and their conduct specious;—but if once you join hands with them, they unfold themselves like serpents, and contaminate the hearts they win to approve them, by the most insidious and bewitching methods.

Moreover, the very dregs of the French nation—girls, who, in the evening, mix in revels that Comus himself might participate, in
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the morning appear demure, pious and faint-like, except where they think they can safely unlock their lips, or recommend themselves by tales of gallantry—these, Madam, likewise assist at every holy assembly—these sing forth the praises of the great Author of all things, in the very moment, perhaps, when their thoughts are wantoning in recollected vices, or planning future iniquity.

Are such—can such be fit companions for the all-lovely Miss Gerrard? Yet these are the schools the infatuated people of England send their children to; though they receive no child back; for their hearts are alienated by a difference in religion—a religion that glories in its want of charity, and considers heretics and brutes on a level, besides having their heads turned by a taste for gallantry.—But I will pursue this disgusting subject no farther: hasten then, Madam, I beseech you, to rouse your friend from the lethargy her good sense has fallen into; strive to convince her by arguments, such as I know you are mistress of, (strengthened by the honest hints and unexaggerated description this letter contains,) that all she beholds is a farce, a stage trick, and that when the curtain is once drawn aside she will shudder at her condition, and to the latest moment of her life deplore the fatal price she shall have paid for her knowledge of the facts which you represented to her in vain.

I am looked upon as a child, and therefore am left at liberty to pry into abundance of things I should otherwise be ignorant of—important truths, which for fear of accidents

dents I dare not relate, though, perhaps, you will think I have ventured hard in what I have already committed to paper ; but be assured, Madam, the lion's den is not a more dangerous place of residence than a convent, and that tigers and wolves are less savage than the men who live by hypocrisy, and disregard every thing but exterior.

I am, &c.

The LITTLE NIOBE,
alias

ARABELLA SMITH.

LETTER X.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

I Thank you for your friendly intention ; but, indeed, my dear Nancy, you are imposed upon. — Whatever advances I have made towards a renunciation of the world, are all self-dictated ; as a proof of which I will describe to you the behaviour of those about me.

On my first arrival every one pursued their wonted track, before my name was known amongst them, or my disposition, to speak in your language, in any degree founded, and I fell in love with the uniform of peace and holiness which they always wore ; — but no sooner did I express a wish of becoming a sister, than they were wrapt up in reserve, lest I should suspect them of designs upon me, of which their honest open natures were incapable. — Read this, and yield to conviction.

I have,

I have, by the mere dint of intreaties, been present at some conversations which enlighten the soul, which break upon it with the force of revealed truths, and now see what is called the parade of all religious professions in a just point of view.

The minds of the vulgar, my Nancy, are only to be wrought upon by outward show; and, surely, we can never stoop or act unworthily, when it is to save a soul from everlasting perdition.

The gentle Niobe (for I love her in spite of all her erroneous officiousness) is incapable of judging of what the learned alone can comprehend, and are alone qualified to determine the merits:—she has great quickness of perception, but her prejudices confine her to the surface of things;—my thirst for right information pushes me on to the center, or fountain-head of intelligence.

I write by this very packet to my mother, for leave to begin my noviciate, or more properly for her consent, that, by virtue of a dispensation from the father of the church, it may commence its date from the day I entered into this holy mansion:—for I am impatient to put it out of the power of chance or accident to rob me of the prize angels do not disdain to hold out to me, if I will only use the means to obtain it; and I must not trust myself to read your reasonings against my salvation.

I have, moreover, been admitted to some private assemblies, where the nuns, the Superior, and the priests alone, perform acts of devotion;

Apropos of my mother: I find she is not only married, but likely to have a second offspring—and may she never feel—but she cannot on their account, what she did on mine!—I was born too soon for her to love herself in me—on the contrary, by the time they will grow up, the world's pleasures will lose their hold on her heart, and she will be all the mother.

I thank her, however, most unfeignedly, for the last act of kindness bestowed upon me—Had she not treated me in my infancy exactly as she did, or had she failed to place me in my youth in this blessed house, I should never have attained the height of grace and heavenly approbation I now aspire to—May she then be rewarded with every good to her and hers!

Think of what I have said, and let us, I conjure you, tête-à-tête, discuss a point that never can have justice done to it by the best written letters, and be again my own Nancy.

As I am, most sincerely your
MARIA.

L E T T E R X I.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

AH! dear, dear Madam! suffer not yourself to be prevailed upon to enter these walls; for though you may be in no danger of becoming a nun, your thoughts would be so disturbed, so many doubts would, from the fascinating conversation here, be excited, that, as I affirm in the case of the English scholars,
if

if you become not a catholic, you will cease to be a protestant, and have your mind rendered a mere chaos in religion.

Miss Gerrard shuns me—as a proof of the pernicious tenets she has imbibed, her compassion for a poor distressed innocent girl, her affection for a sincere and amiable friend, is extinguished: but it is all for the love of God—the rock on which the best hearts split when in the hands of these baneful reformers.

I am looked upon by the Superior with a jealous eye, and the holy Fathers, as they pass by me, shake their heads: but they are welcome to anathematise me; expel me, torture me, any thing, every thing, rather than make me a proselyte—the view, I have now reason to believe, with which I was brought into this convent, by the pretended friend of my beloved and unsuspecting parents.

The presumptuous idea adopted by the catholics, that they are doing God service, in persecuting the helpless, and betraying the unwary into verbal professions of their faith, is the source of the greatest evil in society; but if I should ever escape their gripe, ever return to my dear country, I will *bare* their hypocrisy to noon-day inspection, and guard the public from future deception.

You, Madam, who live near the English metropolis—have you no hope to communicate to a fugitive respecting America.—Is it still torn by civil commotion? Do Britons plant their batteries against towns their commercial interest should teach them to defend? Can they remain so lost to right reason, justice, and humanity, as to fight the battles of their
foreign

foreign enemies, by cutting off their brothers and their friends, at the same time that they expose themselves to a similar fate? But I am persuaded you have no good news, or your kind heart, unsolicited, would have dictated it instantly to your pen; and though I labour hard to keep myself in patient expectation of better days, it will not, cannot be, and I feel myself a wretched orphan.

If Miss Gerrard does take the veil, I will fly this detested roof. But where can I fly? The treacherous woman that placed me here is at Paris, and without her authority, or my dear undone parents commands, they will never more permit me to be at large. If they are dead, Madam, I am lost; for, as a punishment of my resistance, they will hold me in durance, and make me when they shall hear I am friendless, perform the most servile and disgusting offices for my daily bread.

Yet, let me not wound your gentle nature; you merit, and are the care of, heaven—you have a father, friends, fortune, liberty; I am deprived of all, and, next to the distresses my father and mother are plunged in, I lament Miss Gerrard's desertion of me; her cold, averted looks stab me to the quick—I am jealous of every one she approves, and could rave, cold execrate the wretches that have betrayed her and ruined me.

My selfish anguish shall, however, be subdued: let not, therefore, my good Madam, a thought of me interrupt your attention, though but for a moment, to our friend, while any thing remains within possibility to

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be

be done.—Write on—yet wherefore write? A council of her and our direst enemies instantly assemble on the receipt of your letters—and though her cheeks are bedewed with tears, I know what tears she is taught to call them; the tears of holy love, holy conflict, and holy triumph.—It strikes me, then, that nothing but your picture, though ever such a miniature, can speak forcibly to her heart—these wretches rest much on these eye-traps. Send me, then, Madam, as speedily as possible, the best resemblance of your features you can obtain, giving them as plaintive a cast as is in the power of the pencil, without destroying the character of the countenance, and leave me to find the fit hour for surprising her with a sight of it; and may Heaven be propitious to so innocent a device!

Mrs. Ashly is most unfortunately confined to her chamber, by a slow but alarming disease,—I visit her, indeed, but touch lightly on my sorrows; for she appears to be sinking gradually into the grave, and cannot bear any violent sensations. She loves our Maria as tenderly as we do, and is equally distressed at the idea of her becoming a nun—but, poor thing! flatters herself, against all probability, that some lucky turn will impede the so-much dreaded event, by awakening her to the needful sense of her unhappy infatuation.—But I know them too well; they play to sure a game, when they have once got a good mind in their toils, to leave one opening for a counter-plot; and nothing but a miracle can snatch her

her from destruction, or restore her to her agonized friends.

I am, dear Madam, &c.

A. SMITH.

L E T T E R XII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

MY mother has for once been gracious, and I am permitted to dispose of myself as I please.—Six weeks, then, by virtue of the obtained dispensation, only remain unexpired of my noviciate; and I conjure you by our past friendship, to indulge me with one interview before the everlasting barrier is set up between us.

I now spend all my time in the parlour, or in my devotions—have furnished myself with a veil and beads, and at the conclusion of every prayer remember you. Oh! can it be possible, my Nancy, that hearts so perfectly in unison as ours have been from our very cradle to this period, should jar at last; and that, when I bid a final adieu to the world, you can resolve to continue an inhabitant thereof?

No human object has yet engaged your heart—you are free, are worthier your God than I am, because undetached from life by the mortifications I have experienced: Oh, that you would, then, but consent to reunite yourself to a sister in friendship, by joining yourself to a sister in holiness!

What has the world to offer that could compensate what I am about to enjoy ?

*“ Desires compos’d, affections ever even,
Tears that delight, and sighs that waft to
heaven.”*

I am directed by the good father, into whose hands I have put my conscience, to convert my love of you into a love for your soul only ; our intercourse here is transitory, hereafter eternal.—Think of the power of devotion, Nancy, that could subdue affection like mine, and make me resolve to renounce you, and guide my trembling pen to tell you that resolution, if you cannot be prevailed upon to renounce the world.

I cannot give you an idea of the alacrity with which I perform all my preparatory acts of devotion—even my “ slumbers,” in the language of our favorite poet, are “ obedient, and I wake at stated periods to contemplate the glorious prospect before me. I am not now eighteen ; it is old enough, however, to be wise, and young enough to be anxious to fly from the evil to come.

At confession you have a large share in my memory ; for, as I tell my divine preceptors, your image often, in spite of all my efforts,

—“ *Steals between my God and me.*”

It is in your power to produce a very contrary effect, and, instead of opposing, promote my salvation.

My Arcadian dress is laid aside, and the *habillements* of piety substituted in its place : my superfluous

superfluous hair, flattened down to my forehead, is covered with a cambrick cap, not much unlike what the Foundlings wear in England. I own to you, if every spark of vanity was not extinguished in my composition, I could not be satisfied with my present appearance; for though beauty, “when least adorned, is adorned the most, and that handsome young women look sweetly in this uniform, it adds considerably to the plainness of my features, and the natural gloom of my complexion: but it is no longer in the eyes of mortality that I would appear to advantage—my soul shall wear the wedding-garment, and I will be the bride of Him that made me what I am. I cannot, however, quit this subject without telling you, that the very things which are most unbecoming to *me*, would abundantly increase the loveliness of *your* person; nor do I know a sister in the whole house, take you all in all, that would excel you.

You will, perhaps, wonder I have written thus far without one mention of the Little Niobe.—What I felt for her, Nancy, I now find, was compassion—her tears are most unexpectedly wiped away, and instead of the touching countenance she used to present me with, I see joy in every feature; though her poor soul is in a most alarming state, as she wilfully shuts her ears to every friendly, if divine, admonition.

Not but I confess she has cause for rejoicing, as the father and mother she has so long deplored, are arrived in Ireland; and though it is not probable she will very speedily see

them, yet their safety must give her unspeakable satisfaction. The truth, indeed, is, that I cannot hold the converse with her (though I wish her well) I was accustomed to; for her heart, where religion is the question, is harder than Pharaoh's. I am certain, also, that she spares no pains to prejudice you against my election, and to divide friends is an outrage of the deepest die on the laws of morality.—It is, moreover, hoped, by the whole convent, that she will soon be called to England; for her little tricks, which I found so pleasing, have been detected, and souls have actually been undone by them.

Your last letter was the picture of spleen and groundless disgust—not a trait of my Nancy's softness, sweetness, or ingenuousness, did it contain—I was sorry for it, because I had painted you what I found you in our day of harmony, when with a silken rein I could have guided you at will.

I had you prayed for last night by a whole army of saints, and have great faith in the efficacy of their prayers: let me not meet with a disappointment!

I must intreat you to send me your determination as early as you can; for, if you fail to indulge me with a parting interview, it will cost me some pangs to get over the stroke of unkindness: yet disguise not the barrier the arch-fiend may set up between us—to *know* our danger is the next thing to being guarded against it, and to *feel* it the next step to flying it for ever—my arms shall be open to receive you,

you, as open as you will find those of your God.

Adieu, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XIII.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss GERRARD.

Madam,

HOWEVER the secret may be hid from yourself, it is apparent to me that the religion you have embraced *contracts*, not, *enlarges*, the heart, and teaches its votaries to sacrifice every finer feeling on the altar of superstition:—that your suspense, however, may terminate respecting me, I take this method to inform you, *life*, which, in my construction of the word, is only another name for social satisfactions, has more charms for me than ever.

Were things in a convent what they *seem*, and the great Author of the Universe the ultimatum with every heart, I would be the first to exchange earthly for heavenly joys: but be assured, when the veil is withdrawn, you will regret the pleasures of friendship, and find that to do our duty in the state of existence to which we are called, I mean in the bosom of society, is an actual, an essential part of our devotion; for it is a chearful acquiescence with, and a lively approbation of, the will of Providence.

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I admire

I admire the thought in the Spectators of erecting a temple of *praise*—prayers are selfish, and too often result from the timidity of our natures, but *praise* is the incense of gratitude, and must be acceptable with him, whose bounty is intended for our happiness, and whose loving-kindness never fails.

As to the pretty Niobe, what has she done, what crime committed, to forfeit your good opinion?—She is too volatile to think, and too innocent to err. Yet, because she will not subscribe to what she cannot comprehend, or practise what is repugnant to *her* sense of things, she is to be an alien to your affections, and weep, in the midst of her joy for the safety of her near and dear relations, the loss of your friendly brow and agreeable conversation.

Had I foreseen the fatal consequence of your journey to France, I would, at all hazards, have followed you; for I cannot but persuade myself my personal arguments, if timely administered, would have proved a shield of defence to your best of hearts, though you have been able to despise what I have written in order to repel the poison it has imbibed.

I have no beads to number my prayers by, or furnish me with graceful pauses of devotion; but, believe me, I shall never offer up a petition to Him who can alone convince you of your error, without feeling how much I have loved you.

I pity your misfortune in having such a mother—and, oh! ('tis in vain to deny it) I lament you as dead—dead to my hopes, my affections, my wishes.

May

May those who are to peruse this letter advise you to drop your labours in the cause of piety, where I am the object ;—for a protestant I have lived, and a protestant I will die, and to my latest moment pray for all orders and degrees of men, whether Jews, Christians, Mahometans, or Pagans ; nor ever once be brought to renounce the religion of *charity*.—Maria ! Maria ! is it possible you can resolve we shall never meet again ?

ANNE FREEMAN.

L E T T E R X I V .

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

YOUR letter, dear Madam, has produced a very contrary effect to my hopes—but I am a novice in these matters—and the poor deluded Miss Gerrard is exhorted to overcome her attachment to you as the first proof of her being qualified for the election she now aspires to.

I met her this morning in the cloisters ; her eye spoke watching, and her faded cheek that all was not well within—but enthusiasm will conquer, and we shall lose our friend. I wish she was in America ; it should go hard but I would do violence to her *person*, to preserve her *mind* from the worm that never dies—for whether it is repentance of crimes, or repentance of choice, will signify little when the peace becomes a prey to it.

I caught her hand as she passed me, and pressed it to my lips: she lifted her eyes immediately up to Heaven, as if to implore support—fumbled for her beads, and left me, repeating a *Pater Noster*—But she was soon reconfirmed in her holy resolutions by the sisterhood, while I dropped the unavailing tear over the dissolution of a friendship I had flattered myself would have ended only with our lives.

She will be a dangerous creature when she once becomes a nun—her manner is so winning, her address so persuasive—for no hearts but yours and mine, I am satisfied, will be able to resist her eloquence. I did intend to have quitted the convent so soon as she took the veil—but now that I have no hopes of being restored to the arms of my dear father and mother (though I have the unspeakable happiness to know they are safe), every self-concern is swallowed up in friendship, and I will not leave her, until I see her, not only fixed beyond recal, but how her change of condition suits her temper, and answers her expectations.

Several engines have again been set to work, in order to get at *my* mind, since Miss Gerard has so unfortunately led the way—but I defy the “devil and all his works,” and will remain *obdurate*—these peoples word for constancy of soul, to the last.

I begin, Madam, to shoot up, and shall not much longer be distinguished, at least with propriety, by the epithet *little*; but Heaven forbid any womanly appearance or behaviour should

should be assumed by me in this house—for priests have eyes, and, however they may overlook your humble shrubs, gaze in a most extraordinary manner on your well-grown damsels; whenever they meet with them.

I have been tempted, now that joy has deigned once more to visit my bosom, all but where Miss Gerrard and my country are concerned, to go, out of frolic, to confession, and beg to be considered as a daughter of the church—but what, I beseech you, could an innocent girl like myself have to confess, unconnected with the world, and unattached to mankind—save the purloining of a few sugar-plumbs, or casting the eye of desire on a gay ribbon?—I protest to you, I know not what I could say, if I was ever so good a catholic, on such an occasion, unless to lament the ravages of war could be construed into a crime, or the ardent longing for peace to my distracted country could be deemed an offence against heaven.—But though I thus presume to ridicule the follies of catholicism, I am, believe me, my dear Madam, incapable of imagining, that either merit of character, or goodness of heart, is confined to any particular sect—for there are, I doubt not, worthy papists, and unworthy protestants, and *vice versa* to the end of the chapter.

Can you forgive my trifling thus with my pen?—I am but a young letter-writer, and have no rule beyond the dictates of my fancy, or the suggestions of my reason, as they happen to predominate—the one inclines me to be playful, the other bids me be serious, bids me
feel

feel your condescension in corresponding with me, and hasten to assure you, that I am, with all imaginable respect and affection,

Yours, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XV.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

ONCE more, before the never-to-be recalled step is taken, and that our correspondence, like every other earthly pleasure, must give place to heavenly, I am permitted to bid you adieu—and, in return for your *hauteur* and severe censures on my conduct, tell you, that I not only pity and forgive you, but languish for our re-union.

You are displeased our friendship should be weakened, that is, *moderated*, by the intervention of divine love; yet expect me to be unmoved, at your refusing me one visit, just to view what you reject for a world of folly and misery, and our eternal separation thrown like a feather by you into the scale.

Your person is lovely, your understanding superior to most of your sex; but this, my sweet girl, is not the age for permanent attachments—should you therefore marry, you must prepare yourself for out-living your husband's complaisance, if not his tenderness: and believe me, to a mind so delicate as yours, the former would prove a heavy grievance.

Marriage

Marriage is a human, a political, a divine institution, and children the seedlings, the props of society ; but, as there is a sufficient number of persons in the world to fulfill this duty, I cannot bear to think heaven should be robbed of such a prize as your virgin affection. What husband can love you better than I do, or what children compensate the interrupted communication between you and your God ?

Married people, my dear, make their cold offering of a *moiety* of their hearts ; the unmarried give *all* ; and I leave you to judge which has most merit on high. If I asked you to become a Jew, or a Mahometan, I should expect you to start aside, and despise my exhortations ; but it is the *pure* religion of your forefathers I intreat you to embrace, unwarped by pride, and unclouded by enthusiasm.

Mr. Freeman is a man of the world, and places all his felicity in worldly things ; but you may read in your Bible, that it is required of us to leave father, mother, *friends*, for Him that demands to be loved in singleness of heart.

I am impowered to offer you, if you will only let me see you, an apartment to yourself, and a table in that apartment, where you should be served as in your castle, without controul, invasion, or annoyance whatever.

There was a time, Nancy, when an interview with her you loved would have been deemed cheaply purchased, if at a certainty purchasable, and the only possible price, by an East-India voyage—will you, then, persist in refusing to cross a little strait of eight leagues

leagues in the cause of friendship. Your new favourite, the little Niobe, shall meet you, and attend you wherever you go; sleep with you; eat with you: and you know her obstinacy too well not to be sensible she will much rather *harden* than soften your heart.

I have no struggle but the loss of you; no regret but you, no pull on my heart-strings but for you—Oh! that we might go hand in hand together, and never cast one longing look behind after the vanities, the idle gratifications of mortality.

Your answer to this *last* address, remonstrance, and most earnest petition, will be impatiently expected by me; and if it fails of its desired effect, I can only add, farewell! farewell for ever!

I am, &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XVI.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

MISS GERRARD has been very uneasy for this weak past at not hearing from you: you might, she says, have written, if it was only to deny her request; but your silent contempt is cruel, and wrings her soul, in spite of all the *stock* of religion she has acquired. How much, my dear Madam, does she mistake the state of her heart, when she fancies herself detached from earth and you? Nay,

Nay, I have the vanity, sometimes to think she does not behold *me* with the *pious indifference* she persuades herself, but that, when the flutter of her probation is over, and the irrevocable vow has passed her lips, she will wish she had listened to the voice of her young friend, as she used kindly to call me, and lived to reason and to freedom.

Her mother is most unnaturally eager to push her on, and, that nothing in her power may be wanting, has already furnished her with the little presents it is usual to make the sisterhood on initiation.

A diamond crucifix is to be given to the Superior, which I have had it hinted to me should be mine, if I would relax my *obduracy*; for these people will *buy* souls at any price, and are often in their turn the dupes of artful temporisers: but peace be with them, if such wretches can have peace, and be their treasures unenvied, their giftsever spurned by me! Liberty of conscience is the birth-right of every individual, and I will not, Esau-like, set it up for sale for all their gems.

A few evenings ago, I stole gently to our dear friend's apartment, and found her on her knees, ejaculating before a mezzotinto crucifix: she was not disturbed by my presence, though I came up quite to the table, until, taking advantage of a particular sentence, on uttering of which her eyes were turned up and fixed for a second or two, like another Magdalen's, I slipped your miniature, which I had received only a few days before, between her and the object of her adoration, and there-
by

by gave her such mortal offence, that I was turned out of the room, and the door bolted upon me. I, however, left the little image to plead for itself; and if I have any skill in physiognomy, it did raise a tender conflict in her soul which nothing but enthusiasm could allay; but enthusiasm, like an eddy, bears down all before it, and I fear you have transmitted me your resemblance in vain.

Her dress is preparing; I mean the dress in which she is to be sacrificed; but I am not thought worthy to behold it—the sight is reserved for purer eyes than mine. She is, however, kind in her unkindness; for I should weep over it as I formerly did for my distressed father and mother, and still frequently do for the miseries of my beloved country.

But you have given me new life, by telling me you hope matters are in train for an accommodation—Oh! how I shall love, and bless, and pray for, his Majesty King George, if such an event does take place; for we Americans, Madam, are loyal above all his British subjects, and *therefore* so deeply wounded and provoked at being left a prey to rapacious, or at best cruelly misjudging ministers.

The lower orders of the people in England are clamorous for their liberties, but, I am well assured, stand tamely by whilst their fetters are forging. This encouraged the men, who knew not the complexion of us Americans, to conclude a few shot fired over our heads would *scare* us into submission, and bend our shoulders to the yoke of despotism—but we *wore not our daggers in our mouths*—all was
humble.

humble solicitation to the throne, till hope itself was lost, and no second choice was left us, and you see the melancholy consequence.

You will pardon my pen for thus running retrograde to *your* concerns; but as out of the abundance of the heart the lips will speak, so out of the abundance of the feelings my pen will have its lapses, though it obeys the summons with pleasure to subscribe me, &c. &c.

ARABELLA SMITH.

LETTER XVII.

From the Same to the Same.

MISS Gerrard is quite lost—This morning, though, I confess, with averted face and visible agitation, she returned me your picture. “I am enjoined this act of self-denial, said she, or I believe I never could have parted with my Nancy’s likeness, notwithstanding her cruel labours to erase the original from my breast.”—I would have replied, but she was evidently afraid of trusting herself on the tender subject, and hastily retired.

It is, Madam, presuming on a slender title, the friendship I *feel* for you, though personally unknown, to solicit the indulgence of retaining the miniature as your gift; but if there is truth on earth I speak one, when I assure you I love you both for Miss Gerrard’s sake and your own: for have I not testimonials

nials under your hand that prove you an amiable character? And I should not only consider it as my most valuable possession, but would wear it next my heart for ever. I will, nevertheless, be prepared for the worst, and begin this very hour to wean myself from the pleasure I take in talking to it and contemplating it, until I receive your commands, either to keep or restore it to its lawful owner.

A new anthem is composing for our day of tribulation—on the words, “Many daughters have done wisely, but thou excellest them all” and they tell me the music will be very fine—I don’t doubt it—to swell the pomp of of human sacrifice.—I fear, if I am admitted into the choir, my eyes will be so deluged with tears, that I shall not be able to distinguish one object from another, and my ears so dead to the voice of the charmer, that to me all will be discord around.

I rejoice unspeakably at your constancy in resisting all Miss Gerrard’s soft persuasions to visit her—for spells, I affirm it, would have beset you—your feet and heart would have been entangled, and a fresh source for my tears opened upon me; though, indeed, I may almost speak of myself in the language of Eloisa; for to “read and weep” seems now all I have to do.

A whole cargo of *catholic* protestants, alias scholars, from this blessed academy, were shipped off yesterday for Old England. Cheap-side and Gracechurch-street will be wonderfully *improved* by their *improvements*; for the
poison

poison of erroneous tenets is lodged in their souls—extract it who can.

I asked a little girl on the low pension, the other day, what she had learned by visiting France. She replied, with great *naïveté*, to eat soup and tell her beads. “What, rejoined I, is your father a catholic, then?”—“No, Miss, both my father and mother go to Wapping-church every Sunday, and will make me go there too when I return home; but what of that? I shall never forget my *Ave Marias*, or my *Pater Nosters*, and can be of what religion I please, you know, in my heart.

How well instructed these poor things are! for this is the sense of them all. But I am astonished they are not cautioned to keep their own secrets—I forget, however, that I am now telling tales out of school, and that her private sentiments were only spoken to a sister scholar, who might very fairly be supposed to have made similar advances in her love of the *holy* religion.

For my part, I, as an American, am surprised the King of England does not strike out some means of prohibiting the exportation of his infant subjects.

The Spartans and Romans, my dear Madam, knew the importance of giving the children of their subjects a proper education, and we of the Western continent are humble imitators of their conduct in that respect, and therefore we find the education of youth under both those illustrious powers was constituted an article of state-policy, in consequence of which,

which, as a British poet says of a British family,

*“ The men were all valiant,
The women all virtuous.”*

Yet, though it must be owned you have many salutary laws to protect your manufactures, and preserve the national proprietorship in many branches of commerce, two thirds of your people, without let or molestation, send their children, the most valuable commodity, not only into an enemy's country, but into the bosom of a church that militates in every particular against the interest and happiness as well of the monarch as the immediate relations of the present and rising generations. As this part of the evil, however, is sometimes concealed, this point of conduct might be in a small degree palliated:—but the morals, Madam, are voluntarily given up; for it is notorious, that with a knowledge of the French language a taste for French vices is imbibed, French propensities, and French prejudices—and the infection spreads itself throughout all ranks of the community, either from the address, enthusiasm, or casual connexions of each individual.—I much fear, nevertheless, that these reflections will be deemed pertnesses in a girl of my age, though they might have the desired weight, if falling from the pen of experience—but it is nature's fault, not mine: for fancy and reflection hurry me frequently out of my depth, which would not be the case if you condescended to become my monitor, for you could mould me to your will. I am, &c.

A. SMITH.

L E T T E R XVIII.

From the Same to the Same.

OUR friend, in all those spirits enthusiasm gives, is now entered into her last week.—She still avoids me, or, more properly, all conversation with me; for, as a proof of the conquest she has gained over herself, she meets my eye more frequently than usual, and affects to view me with unshaken attention.

It was moved, it seems, in an assembly of my enemies, that I should be excluded the chapel the *day of days*, lest my distress should be found contagious, and ruffle the new convert; but as virtue is not virtue for nothing, it was at length determined, that, if I chuse to be present, I shall be indulged, in order that I may be witness of her triumph over the passions, and the firmness with which she makes a sacrifice of every thing to her God.

The dress she is to wear has been publicly exhibited, and is a kind of robe-coat—such as your tragedy queens strut their little hour in on the stage—of puckered white sattin, with shoes the same; and her hair is to be ornamented with the nicest care—but when the vow is passed, the benediction received, and and the sacrifice concluded, she is to be led to the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of the sisterhood, arrayed in like manner with them, and supported by a pair of them—and then re-conducted to the altar to finish the *raree-show*,—as I should call every ceremony of this nature, if an amiable

able individual in general, and the beloved friend of our hearts in this particular instance, was not the fatal *fool* of it.

But I should tell you, that I have at last, Madam, from desperation, acquired that state of mind which, I believe, passes in the world for *philosophy*; and very good philosophy it is to *bend* beneath the inevitable blast—Distraction and suicide are born of the contrary complexion; besides which, many a head that has meekly bowed to the will of heaven, has by its blessed, its gracious favour, been raised again to hope and joy.

A cell is fitted up, I am told, for the devoted one, and a taper provided, by the light of which she is to *worry* the Deity with her prayers, and on her knees fight out her salvation: nor are any appendages of outrageous piety omitted; as if it could be acceptable that the creature should scourge itself, or inflict punishments which nature and the Creator never intended. My creed, however, coincides with Mr. Pope's assertion, that

—“*God is paid when man receives:
To enjoy is to obey.*”

Nor shall his bounty ever be abused, his gifts (knowingly) perverted by my grateful heart. It, moreover, seems to me like taking the reins out of the hands of Providence, that wisely dashes the cup of giddy felicity with an antidote against the poison it contains, and disappoints those wishes that would lead down to sorrow and repentance, leaving all the rest open to our free election and regulation. I shall,

shall, indeed, I am convinced, derive one advantage by dwelling within this house; for I have contracted such a habit of tracing the action up to its remotest source or spring, at least so far as human discernment reaches, that I shall not easily be imposed upon when I launch again on the ocean of life.—The bell rings to call the nuns and their sister-elect to prayer.—Oh! Madam, how frail is resolution and delusive opinion!—I weep, and all my boasted philosophy is no more.—Nay, such are the contradictory emotions of my heart, that I now wish to fly, and am anxious to be a spectator of a scene no power on earth can prevent being exhibited at our expence, the preparations being advanced so far beyond the point of probability, or surrounded as she is by a *host* of foes, possibility, of dissuasion. That you have escaped their toils is my only consolation: we will meet, Madam, if fate itself forbid not, and indulge ourselves on such sorrowful subjects as our mutual knowledge of the merit we have been robbed of will suggest to us.—Oh! do not refuse me your friendship, let the change or chance be what it may; for if sighing for your sighs, and weeping for your tears, deserves a kind return, you ought to be wholly mine.

My father and mother continue to tell me, it is their opinion, that, since I have been introduced into this convent, it will be best for me to remain here until they may find rest for their weary feet, and a paternal roof to shelter my young head; for, like the poor Jews of old, they are despoiled of their possessions, and driven

driven out from their native land, never, perhaps, to have the former restored to them, or to know the joy of revisiting the latter—Yet, wretch that I am, are not their precious lives granted to my prayers, and dare I murmur where I ought to adore in thankfulness to the latest moment of my existence?

When Miss Gerrard is no longer one of this world, I shall seldom behold her; for it is only those nuns that mix in the schools, who have been received on a footing like that of your foundations in England, or for a subsistence---How the others spend their time I have never been able to discover; but if appearances were not above measure deceitful, I should conclude devotion at once the business and pleasure of their days---But I want faith in all these respects; for piety is too high a key to be always kept up, and relaxation as natural and as necessary a relief to the soul of a nun, as any other human being---Good God! that people of understanding can be so absurd, nay wicked, as to labour at extinguishing that first of all blessings, sensibility, and deny themselves that first of all enjoyments, society, which is the end of our being, the source of our happiness, and both a moral and divine indulgence to the rational part of mankind. But I begin to get out of my depth; for, my dear Madam, there are certain subjects that unhinge my poor reason, though they cannot deprive me of my remembrance how much I am

Your, &c.

A. SMITH.
LETTER

L E T T E R X I X .

From the Same to the Same.

ALL, my dear Madam, is now over ; and the once sprightly, friendly, amiable Miss Gerrard, has cut herself off from every earthly concern, and every earthly felicity. The choir was crowded beyond all example, and many more priests assisted at the ceremony than usual on such occasions—but it is a glorious sight to them, for an English lady, bred up in protestantism, and in the bloom of life, not only to embrace their faith, but be wedded to her Saviour from deliberate choice, self-dictated election, and unbiaſſed conduct—this, Madam, is their triumphant language, this the point on which they ring such abundant and heart-wounding changes, that I am often obliged to fly to my chamber to relieve my oppressed bosom—I need not mention how.

When notice was given that the procession was at the gates of the choir, I started and trembled : the sisters with songs of gladness, and much in the coronation style, as represented in our news-papers, preceded her—they were going to seal the salvation of a new convert, and add another virgin to the throne of heaven.—Thus far my senses reached—but the moment I perceived her approach, my sight failed me, I fainted, and was conveyed to my own apartment with as little bustle as possible ; and before I could well be said to be recovered, the vow had passed her lips, the insepara-

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ble barrier was set up between us and her for ever. I picked out of one of the scholars, that she looked up to where I sat, changed colour on my illness, and stopped for half a second; but the loud organ, and peals of hosannas, roused her to the necessary pitch, and she proved all their barbarous hypocritical hearts wished her. Two days are now elapsed; but, as I foretold, she is invisible, though I have traversed every spot on which I ever met the sisterhood since my entrance into the convent.

To tell you the truth, Madam, when I reflect that the step she has taken is irrevocable, I rejoice, rather than lament, we have been spared a rencounter; for the idea I have of true friendship is, that it will promote the happiness of its object, though to the wounding of its own feelings—May, then, the illusion continue! for so long, and so long only, will she find what she sought for in the sisterhood, and the holy exercises of their holy characters.

Another English girl, of small fortune, captivated with the *splendor* of the *show* and the applauses bestowed on our lost friend, has, I am told, solicited to be put on her noviciate—but these artful people know when to *deny* and when to *gratify*, themselves—Were these events frequent, their schools would decline: they, therefore, contrive to *root* a love of their religion in the young heart, also, by persuading such as they do not think it safe to make devotees of, to return to the world, and do their God all the service in their power; alias, poison every mind they can come at—a conduct which

which never fails to produce the desired effect.

I am again strongly tempted, as a means of opening a communication between me and Miss Gerrard, to pretend an inclination to become a proselyte, for the short time I may have now to remain under this diabolical roof, and deceive the deceivers: for, as I have already affirmed, these people, from their over-eagerness to add to the number of souls, as their phrase is, are the easiest duped of any people on earth—Was I, then, only to collect my features into an affectation of *pious* sorrow, and move about with “measured step and flow,” I should soon be caressed and extolled to the skies—But, Madam, I am restrained from my frolic, by my incapacity to determine whether the mockery would not rather fall on religion than their hypocrisy; and whether I should not offend the Being I reverence, by this mode of ridiculing man—Besides, it might be dangerous, for who knows how far Heaven in its wrath might abandon me to the tempter, if, like a moth about a candle, I daringly played about temptation?—Ah! that thought has decided the point at once, nor will I venture to provoke or brave my destiny.

Yet it is a most mortifying thing to a damsel of my unbounded curiosity, to be confined *without* the pale of knowledge, the *free-masonry* of convents—but though I panted ever so ardently after the secret, I will not even expose myself to the hazard of paying the preposterous price of *initiation* to obtain it, if it was

only for the love I bear my dear country—no nuns can transport themselves to their natal spot, they cease, Madam, to be *moveables*, and learn to think, to act, to live, from the lessons of their priests, whose interest it is to hold their understanding in fetters, and mislead their hearts.

Could I deliver myself from one conviction. I should be tolerably happy—but if our friend has not already, she *must* repent the choice she has made—What cold intercourse will she meet with to what she has experienced in your friendship, and what regrets, what compulsions, must she not endure!

It is the policy of the French nation to shut up the superabundant part of a family in a convent, as, without this check to propagation, their noblesse would dwindle into bourgeoisie, and all ranks of people become so numerous as to be ready to eat one another. Moreover, it is a truth, that their fasts have more of the statesman than the ecclesiastic in their institution, in order to guard the subjects of an overgrown monarchy from the disgrace of having the mark of *famine* set upon them in unfavourable seasons—Thus they have the address to *cover* all their *wants*, and all their *vices*, with the specious veil of *piety*, as they do their follies with the gaudy veil of *fashion*; nay, are so dexterous, in most instances, as to hide both the one and the other from their own hearts.

You will pardon all these wildnesses—the story of our woe might indeed be told in few words, but to ease the wounded heart it must

be suffered to complain, and I cannot doubt of your indulgence, on any and every occasion to

Your, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XX.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss SMITH.

I AM unspeakably indebted to your kind and unremitted attention to me as well as to my dear, though lost, friend.

Our parting had, indeed, something ominous in it—she was torn from me without notice or preparation; and her heart was so quickly, so instantaneously won by the fatal religion she now professes, that I had not time to caution, to protect her against its insinuations. You remark very justly, my dear, that the softness of her nature made her an easy prey, in conjunction with the unnatural treatment she received from her mother—Oh! I pity as abundantly as I lament the dire fascination, and, except yourself, will never more enter into tender friendship with any one.

Every obliging wish of your heart respecting me shall be accomplished: you shall bring me acquainted with your honoured relation; and when I have a home, (for in my father's house I cannot call myself independent,) I will in-treat the happiness of your company.

But much as I should rejoice to see you I

cannot conquer a foolish fond desire that you should continue where you are, until you can get at a certainty with regard to our friend's sentiments of her new condition—And yet to what purpose? To know her wretched, would aggravate our distress without saving her a single pang—I know not how to act, but inclination will evermore take the lead of reason; and therefore, unless absolutely recalled, let me intreat you to have the resolution to wait until she becomes visible, and you may judge from her countenance what passes in her heart, for they never could contradict each other.

It is thought, my good girl, that, though a peace may not be concluded, your countrymen will have breathing-time granted them by a cessation of hostilities.—I cannot, I own to you, conceive it a reasonable demand, that so large a limb of the British empire should be lopped off from the parent stock—Independence was not what the Americans looked up to, when they started aside from our friendship; for, instead of the aggrieved, they would have then been, in the strictest sense of the word, the aggressors.

They grew up under our wing, and their prosperity was derived from the same source as ours; but wicked men ever poison the minds of the good, and now no terms of accommodation are to be listened to, much less accepted, that fall short of a separate government. The cessation of arms, however, if it does take place, will give them leisure for reflection; and reflection will, I trust, convince them, that they can alone find their safety, or their advantage,

vantage, in the good of the whole : nor must you demand beyond that point, if you would have me love you.

I have seen Miss Gerrard's mother ; she is gay and unconcerned : she would have spoken to me, but my heart rejected the overture, and retired much agitated.—Had she, my sweet Niobe, felt her daughter's perfections as I do, they had never been buried in a cloister—but her vanity was the bane of our happiness ; for, instead of rejoicing in the merits of her child, her second self,

“ She sicken'd at all triumphs but her own,”

and was eager to lose a rival in the person of our dear and amiable friend, by betraying her into the sacrifice she has made.

But, if I am not much mistaken, she is in the high road to punishment : the man she has married, and, it seems, intrusted with her whole fortune, is very agreeable, but both dissipated and unprincipled.—They live at a violent rate ; and, though she apprehends it not, it is highly probable, in an hour of security, they may be tumbled from their eminence into obscurity, and *all* those horrors a change from prosperity to adversity must bring to such a mind as hers.

From the liberality of your sentiments, (for friendship is the offspring alone of liberality,) you will find it hard, perhaps, to believe, that such a woman as Mrs. Gerrard can exist ; but, to the dishonour and reproach of the sex, there is a species of females, who, having been once young, will needs be always so, and feel

every stroke of praise or approbation bestowed on a sister female, as an indirect impeachment of their own charms and claims to consideration and homage. I thank Heaven for tuning my soul to a less absurd and ungenerous key.

I will now, my dear little confident and correspondent, give you a proof of my friendship, by explaining to you what I mean by a hint which has fallen from my pen, viz. that, in my father's house, I am not sufficiently mistress of myself to receive even the friend of my heart.—My father has, within these few days, told me that he wishes I would turn my thoughts to a change of condition, and directs my choice to a man I can never approve.—We are not yet come to an *eclaircissement*; so I have, 'tis true, only my fears at present to tell me what will be the consequence of my refusal—for refuse I must.

I have found him greatly indulgent from my infancy to this period; but in these points the best of fathers sometimes depart from their characters, and insist upon implicit obedience, where God and Nature, I conceive, only meant they should have a restraining or regulating voice: for though I think it a violation of the freedom of the mind for fathers to *force* their children into matrimony, I also think it unnatural, and an offence against every moral every divine obligation, for children to dispose of themselves without the parental sanction; and these tenets will be my rule of conduct: so that there can be little danger of my making an ungrateful return to any lenity or yeildingness

ness that may be shewn me in this particular and important article of my happiness.

My Maria has, in my hour of need, cast me off, or into her bosom I should have poured my sorrows, if sorrow is in store for me, and from her judicious pen have derived consolation and support—yet, let her steps have been what they may, in that, from mistaking artifice for sensibility, design for piety, she has been induced to throw herself into the iron arms of a convent, and dig herself a premature grave—we must not forsake her. Quickened, therefore, if possible, for my sake, your diligence to discover if aught can be done to promote her convenience, or soften her bondage; and should she, at length, so far relax her austerities as to write to me, as my heart whispers me she will one day do, be you the blessed medium of our epistolary intercourse, and your compassion, charity, and generosity, will be their own reward. Watch then, my love, every favourable crisis, and improve it to the utmost. Would she only consent to write to me, it would, in the scale of my happiness, be a diadem to me; a kind of resurrection of *her* I esteem: nor until I know this bliss attainable, or that your goodness has put it in train, can I wish to see you, unless your own affairs make your coming to England indispensable; but be assured, the moment you have done me this right worthy service, I will intreat as much of your company as can be enjoyed by persons living under different roofs, and be every thing you can ask or desire, to supply the

loss you have sustained, that is in the power of,

Your, &c. &c.

ANNE FREEMAN.

LETTER XXI.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

I AM all obedience to your *wishes*—for *commands*, my dear Madam, is a word unfound in the vocabulary of friendship. By a letter I have just received from my indulgent and beloved father and mother, it is now left wholly to my option, either to remain here, or go to London to a kind, though distant relation, they have engaged to receive me. I shall, therefore, have it in my power to remove myself whenever I am so pleased, which shall not be the case whilst my continuance spares you one sigh, or promises in the remotest degree to be useful to our friend.

I am become an adept in the science of dissimulation;—never mention Miss Gerrard's name but in private to Mrs. Ashley, who is so disgusted with the convent for entrapping this object of our tender concern, that she is casting about for a new situation.

I have the pleasure, amidst all my other mortifications, to see this amiable woman's health returning, and can visit her, at stolen periods, without hearing the sighs of sickness, or beholding its fearful ravages in her very agreeable

ble countenance. She was so ill and low, that I begged she might not be told Miss Gerrard intended, or had taken the veil, except in a prepared way by myself; for I knew it would be a most affecting piece of news to her, as she loves her unfeignedly: nor need I describe to you how we spent the interview, in which I broke the intelligence, like a clap of thunder, after every possible softening, on her head—though she had seen enough to alarm her before she was confined by her indisposition to her chamber.

Her disorder, instead of a consumption, proved to be an abscess on the lungs, which, with great pain and danger, she has overcome, and lives to support me in the task you have done me the honor to enjoin me; and I think I may venture to bid you hope every thing from our joint endeavours in your service, as our hearts will be in the cause.

* * * *

Read, my dear Madam, read with astonishment, what I have now to communicate:—how happy I am that I did not dispatch my letter as I intended! for it contained only assurances of vigilance you could not doubt, and friendship, you have kindly told me, you are so just to me as to rely upon—but read, read what my pen is eager to present you with!

Sauntering an hour ago through the cloisters, as the most likely place of all others to gain a sight of our friend, a troop of holy virgins, amongst the number of which was Miss Gerrard, rushed by me. I remained fixed as a statue, until I felt my hand gently pressed

pressed by her, and perceived a tear trembling in her eye.—I had, nevertheless; the presence of mind to remember we were not alone, and only looked after her so long as a trace of her remained.

Alas ! but two months devoted, and already disenchanting ?—But Heaven's will be done ! I shall often revisit this spot, and if possible, discover her cell ; when my next care shall be to furnish her with pen, ink, and paper, that she may write us all she will condescend to communicate of her melancholy disappointment. Your fears, as well as mine, were prophetic, though, indeed, the comparison will not hold good between them ; for yours were all conjectures, mine founded on demonstration.

Let us not, however, anticipate the evil that has not reached us ;—what I construe repentance, may be only tender regard :—it is, however, plain she has discovered all is not *sin* the voice of the priest may pronounce such ; and that she is resolved to renew our friendship. If this should merely be the case, all we can now wish for is accomplished—though, believe me, Madam, had I vowed to lead a life of angel purity and peace, and been deceived into an opinion that it was attainable, or, more properly, the purchase of that vow, I should think, the instant I discovered the cheat, that there was more virtue in the breach than in the observance of it.—But my sense of things is widely different from these enthusiasts, and we must rest the resolution of all
our

our doubts and conclusions wholly on her pen.

The weather was favourable to the salute of the hand our dear friend honored me with—for the arches of these cloisters are so constructed as to “cause a noon-day night,” and it was, moreover, so cloudy, that I am certain no one could perceive what passed.

I have already begun three several letters, and as often burnt them, to intreat she will unbosom herself—but on telling Mrs. Ashley the circumstance, she has convinced me I had much better leave her mind to its own workings, lest I should alarm her, and lock up, instead of exciting, her confidence.

I should be happy, in this exigence, to receive your directions for my conduct, but fear I shall receive them too late; for if she has resolved to break her silence, she will certainly avail herself of the first opportunity.

I shall dispatch this letter of pleasing intelligence, (for is she not again ours?) and follow it with all the expedition any new matter may require: but you may, Madam, assure yourself there is more vice, more unhappiness, and more irreligion, in a convent, than in the most bustling scenes of life; and if my presentiment does not deceive me, we are about to come at a melancholy confirmation of this truth.

Write, dear Madam, by the return of the packet, that nothing may be wanting on your part to strengthen the endeavours I will exert in this common cause of our friendship—I shall be for rending the temple, and bearing
off

off the goddess of our idolatry by violence, if I find she is unhappy ; for I have a turn, you must know, for chivalry, and, had I been a man, I should surely have been a knight-errant.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

L E T T E R XXII.

From the Same to the Same.

NO centinel ever kept more zealous or vigilant watch and ward than I have done, in order to catch once more the eye of our friend—but in vain.—It is true, I have seen her repeatedly, but down-cast looks told me it was not the good time for explanation.

A day of fasting and outrageous humiliation is at hand, for the martyrdom of one of their legendary saints, when, perhaps, I shall meet in sackcloth her who has no crime but fatal credulity to charge herself with.

As to austerities, except in appearances, they are not, it seems, imposed, but rods are conveyed into every separate cell, as a hint how they may voluntarily please the God of love and mercy.

I will leave this letter, as I did my last, in its unfinished state, till after the hoped-for period

period of good, or, I fear, bad tidings is arrived.

* * * * *

THE *eclaircissement* is not far distant; for I have spoken with our penitent, have heard her confess herself wretched—*undone*, I think, was her word—and have obtained a promise of a letter, for the reception of which I am to hold myself in readiness at an appointed hour and place this very evening.

Undone!—How, my dear Madam, undone? Deceived, abused, (heaven and earth!) beyond all remedy.—How shall I reign in my quick and wounded spirit, and wear content in my face, when I have scorpion stings in my heart. But I will be calm, I will, for her dear sake, conquer my impatience of resentment, and not, in an hour of need, from a mistaken, an ill-governed zeal, disqualify myself for the offices she may wish to engage me in.

How tedious will the hour appear till nine in the evening, and with what agitation shall I not approach her!—I trust she will date her letter from her cell, that I may, at least, sigh as I pass by it, to think what a treasure it contains, of which these ministers of darkness keep the key. Oh! be assured, Madam, romances are only witty and sarcastic parables; for the giant's den, the monster's cavern, the distressed damsels, &c. &c. pictured therein, are taken originally from, and are even at this day found, in convents.—The magicians
that

that lie in wait for the innocent and unwary at the doors of the fatal castles, are they not the likenesses of these lady-abbesses, who, with smooth and dissembling speech, allure them into the gripe of their lords, and tickle only to wound?

What is the hour now?—Alas! Madam, only three.—Sad hours, says the immortal Shakespear emphatically, seem long; yet his imagination, possibly, never suggested to him, master as he was of nature and the passions, such an hour as I now experience, borne forward on the heavy, painful wing of suspense.

I am called to prayer—'tis well—I will obey; and Miss Gerrard's deliverance from the hands of her oppressors shall begin and close my supplications, to which I am certain you will gladly say, Amen.

Is there on earth aught more valuable than a diligent and faithful friend?—I never felt my *consequence* till now—now that I am constituted the go-between on this important occasion. Here then, enclosed, is your letter. It was delivered to me unsealed, which I understood as a tacit permission to peruse it.—I have perused it, and shudder, as you will do, at its contents. But read it, and make your own conclusions; for this anticipation must be irksome to you.

My Nancy!

(FOR once more I will call you mine)—
What a fatal monument am I constituted of the sin of credulity!

My

My error was, however, an innocent, I will say, an amiable one.—Disgusted with the world, I flew to the bosom of my God, or, at least, to an asylum I conceived was his image here below ; but I have been cruelly and basely deceived—instead of the soft peace I promised myself, instead of the divine intercourse and heavenly love I expected to enjoy, I find myself cast amongst the high-priests of Baal, and the everlasting companion of women, with worldly, nay, licentious passions in their hearts.

I have had some severe conflicts before I could resolve to speak the wound my peace has sustained—My Little Niobe, how prophetic were her fears ! how affectionate her endeavours to save me from this wreck !—I kneel, and weep, and pray—but, Oh ! Nancy, my prayers, my humiliations, proceed from far different motives than what are imagined, and I feel myself, as far as the world's opinion goes, the very “wretch” Pope describes.

—“*believ'd the spouse of God in vain ;*”

for every bell that calls the sisterhood together, proclaims some new attack on the person of the vestal.

I have often in our happy days weakly sighed that my features and complexion were not as lovely as your own, but I now rejoice in every unfavourable particular ; for, believe me, the want of personal charms is the only protection a convent knows from the overtures of diabolical libertinism.

The

The beautiful girl, who, infatuated like myself, led the way to my fatal exclusion from the world, is, I perceive, bowed down to the earth with apprehension and disgust.— We have exchanged significant, sympathetic looks; for, from what I can gather, we are the chief victims of our own folly—the other nuns, from disappointed passion, wounded reputation, or ruined relations, having sought, for a hiding-place, the house we hoped to find a paradise. But my bitterest reflections have one blessed alloy; for, had you, my sweet girl, yielded to my intreaties, and fixed your everlasting abode under this roof, I should before now have seen you (horror and infamy!) the prey of such — I have not words strong enough to characterise the baseness, and must leave your imagination, if possible, to fill up the *hiatus*.

As to the act of confession, which I thought must be balm to the afflicted heart, it is only practised as a cover for assignation, and a medium for becoming acquainted with the charms of the sisterhood. Mine is always short; I am enjoined to banish the world from my affections, subdue my weakness, break down every hold of carnality, (under which profane terms our friendship is alluded to) and forget whatever was dear to me.

I found myself a visionary a very few hours after my admission to these forbidden recesses—the angelic sweetness of the sisterhood was put on, and put off, with their robes for the day; their rejoicings mechanical, their piety assumed; bursts of sorrow annoyed my ear, and

and footsteps of men alarmed my soul—All dark and private, my dear girl, are the works of wickedness, none but the object of visitation knowing who comes or goes.

A few nights ago, when unavailing repentance kept me 'waking, I was scared by the deep groans which issued from a neighbouring cell: I rose, and, forgetting every self-concern, endeavoured to discover the unhappy one.

I opened a door, and found a young nun in great extremity—a dark lanthorn was by her bedside, from which a faint glimmer of light was suffered to emit. “Tell me, said I, the cause of your deep distress—I am unpractised in the ways of the house, can be secret, and will dare to assist you. I am the sister last received into this mansion.”

She pressed my hand in unutterable anguish—“I am past all human aid, said she, and my sin will be its own punishment: the contents of that phial, conveyed to me by the author of all my calamities, are now corroding my heart-strings—Guess, if you can, the motive—I have been betrayed, every way betrayed, and die, that the reputation of the convent may live.”—Here cold sweats and strong spasms seized her—I would have called for assistance, but she with-held me.

“Ah! no, said she, it is too late, and I must die—this is the fatal reward. But the God of heaven is just; he will punish, he will pardon.—To your cell, thou uncorrupted one! nor lay the foundation of your own ruin, by being discovered to have a knowledge

ledge of mine—Go, and if you would escape from a bad world, die ! for there is no refuge for youth and innocence, but in the grave.”

She now remained silent for some time : I wiped her face with my handkerchief and supported her head with my arm.

“ I have written, said she, my life, at stolen periods, and wished to send it into the world as a warning voice ; but it has been carried away from my cell by the infernal hero of it ; and, indeed, could I have put it into your hands, it was too imperfect for the press, and too dangerous to be kept by you within these walls : and what could it have told you more than you behold, that the wretch, thus untimely sunk to the grave, had once youth and innocence—was betrayed—is undone—and dies ! Yet leave me to do as I was commanded, to die alone, for my last breath now trembles on my lips—fly or you are lost !”—Convulsions then succeeded, and her reason was quite overborne, and, feeling I know not what of fearful apprehension, I returned to my cell, and waited to hear her dissolution announced.

The next morning the whole sisterhood were summoned to pray for the dear departed one, whose virtues had sealed her salvation ; and the unhappy wretch that was inhumanly dispatched by her seducer, to conceal the consequences of her seduction, was sung a virgin, fit for the congregation of heavenly virgins, and the companion of the mother of God.

But, my dear girl, let me warn you not to confound your ideas of these seminaries with the

the worthy professors of catholicism; for numbers are like myself, victims to the goodness of their own hearts: and I even yet think there are many sincere and holy fathers in the church; but the religion is such a cloak for hypocrisy and the vicious have such opportunities of practising vice, that in spite of every tie, I weep that I cannot repose the head of disappointment on the bosom of friendship.

I have, however, one earnest request to make to you.—Let the affection you bore me, my kind and good girl, be transferred to our common friend, the generous, the humane, the too fatally well-judging Miss Smith, who was so greatly assisting in your preservation, and spared no pains to save me.—Adieu! and once again behold the signature of

Your lost

MARIA.

* * * * *

Is it not dreadful, my dear Madam, that such nurseries of infamy should stand? But let me, after the example of our unhappy friend, not forget to be just—The worthy are the prey of the wicked, for so well is the farce of godliness kept up, that parents, in the kindness and caution of their hearts, force their innocent, accomplished, and beloved offspring, into the jaws of the fiend, and to the end of their lives continue to congratulate themselves on the care they have taken of both their souls and bodies.

Miss Gerrard's account, however, exceeds
the

the utmost reachings of my imagination. Intrigue, I was convinced, dwelt within a convent; but murder, gracious Providence! who could have thought of murder? Yet, surely, whether it be the adult or the embryo, to strike at the existence of a human being, is to be guilty in the sight of Heaven.

I do not now wonder that every avenue to the dark recesses of this dire mansion are so diligently guarded under the mysterious veil of superabundant sanctity. Had it been possible for me to penetrate the infernal shades, I had before this, I doubt not, been sacrificed also to the reputation of its inhabitants.

I have, nevertheless, for my friend's safety, all the needful caution I should have despised for my own, and never even *look* dissatisfied; though my heart is bursting with honest indignation.—Is there nothing, my dear Madam, that can be done, nothing attempted to check the career of these monsters? Alas! alas! no—as the poor dead nun affirmed, the grave alone can rescue the innocent from the hands of the destroyer.

I am &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XXIII.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

ANOTHER letter! Madam.—Miss Gerard is much relieved by this communication of her sorrows, and will patiently wait her dissolution.

My

My dear Nancy,

THE beautiful nun I have so frequently mentioned to you, has, at length, broke the ice—and I feel that in a cloister I shall once more taste the pleasures of friendship.

She has promised to steal to my cell at some unsuspected hour, and open her whole soul to me. Her persecutions, she tells me, have been great, but she seems not to apprehend violence, and will, therefore, I trust, go, like myself unpolluted to the grave.

Ah ! how I sit and recollect the innocent amusements of our youth, when liberty and peace dwelt with us, and every art of hypocrisy was unknown !—What a sad change of scene do I experience ! Here is, indeed, a wide range for the sisterhood—gardens, as I formerly told you, laid out in a sweet taste, and companions from morning to evening ; but what companions their own account of themselves will best determine.

A neat, genteel, but pale-looking girl, not yet two-and-twenty, had frequently visited me : she spoke of the world with ardor, of solitude with disgust. I observed, it was strange she should have thrown herself into so opposite a situation to her taste—She replied, she was compelled to it.

Her father, she informed me, is a man of some little rank at court, but of small fortune : he married a woman who brought him barely sufficient to support the style of living she had been accustomed to, and he beheld a growing family with mortification and alarms.

Five boys have grown up to maturity, and
two

two girls, the youngest of which she had the misfortune to be; but though only suffered to mix in polite scenes at her school intervals, (and convents are the only female schools in France,) she was perceived by her friends to be forming a tender intimacy with a youth of good family, who had no provision to hope for, but thro' the interest of his relations at court which was at best but a precarious dependence.

The intention of burying her in a convent was not announced until the young fellow had the courage to ask her father's consent to their nuptials.

This produced an *eclaircissement*, and she was commanded to repair to a Parisian nunnery, and begin her noviciate; for that there was no *living* on love in France, or suffering two handsome beggars to marry and disgrace their families.

To the nunnery she was conveyed, and a father confessor employed to teach her her duty:—she, however, pleaded her cause so well, (at what price I leave you to imagine,) that the holy father moved by her tears, kindly instructed her to appear acquiescent, until she could apprise her lover of the place of her confinement, and contrive a means of escaping to his arms.

This lesson was highly agreeable to this gay, inconsiderate damsel; and so dexterously did she play her part, that before the end of ten days she eloped without suspicion, and without suspicion spent three weeks with her lover—when lo! in one fatal hour, she was surprised

surprised by the arrival of four men, who obliged her to get into a coach, and brought her secretly to this convent, where the self-same confessor, who I fear, first taught her it was no sin to love, and then betrayed the step she had taken, in order to get her wholly to himself attended her, and pathetically exhorted her to become a daughter of the house, and forget a lover who had abandoned her;—giving her, at the same time, such unquestionable proofs of his perfidy, (every one of which I dare believe was false, and merely calculated to effect his own purposes) that he overcame by degrees, the tender doubts her bosom suggested; and in a fit of rage, resentment, and desperation, she consented to devote herself for ever after to the manner of the sisterhood, and bid adieu to a world that had not smiled on her. The way, as I can easily believe, was insensibly smoothed before her—the father, she found, officiated occasionally here, and by his visits strengthened her sometimes wavering resolution, until she was at last enrolled on the list of holy virgins, and her shame and her penitence buried together.—So much for this sister of Jesus, as we saints are called.

Another fine girl, or rather the ruins of a fine girl, has told me that she eloped at fifteen with her dancing-master—was pursued and overtaken by her brother, who, finding them in a bed-chamber, without deigning to hear one word in exculpation of her conduct, stabbed him to the heart, and dragged her in all the horrors of despair to this mansion, where

F

she

she was tenderly received, and gradually soothed into resignation; but having no alternative, notwithstanding her murdered lover is ever, she says, before her eyes, she is not clear from what motive she assumed the veil—but if, for her punishment, the end has been amply answered; for she abhors her situation, goes through all the divine duties with reluctance, and feels a restlessness of soul that plainly speaks her a child of the world, and a vain aspirer after all its vain joys.

A third, with fine blue eyes, an aquiline nose, and a most beautiful complexion, confessed to me a few days ago, that gallantry was her destruction—that is, the cause of her being buried in this convent.

She was bred, it seems, at St. Omer's from whence she was fetched by her mother, as is the French custom, to be married.

The man chosen for her by her careful parents, was twice her own age, and uncommonly plain in his person, but had title and fortune to charm her youthful heart.—A splendid equipage and magnificent wardrobe were not to be resisted; and she rushed into marriage with a thorough contempt for every consequence.

Her husband was very complaisant, but very disagreeable—and in the house with him dwelt a young Abbé, who had the care of his conscience, that might have sat for an Adonis. He dined with them every day, and his fine speaking face, she says, seemed to say the softest kindest things to her. For a time, however, she resolved to be virtuous, and
make

make him adore in silence ; but the frolic came into her husband's head, from possessing a very unusual share of love or curiosity, or both, for a Frenchman, that he would needs insist upon it she should discharge her household priest, that was a sober, ancient father, and trust her salvation to the guidance and documents of this youthful blooming Levite.

Like a dutiful wife she obeyed, and for some time persevered in confessing herself with all becoming devotion to this handsome fellow, (whose person and mind were formed for seduction,) and without the slightest departure from propriety—but opportunity at length gave birth to importunity, and she was as criminal as those enemies of *deliberating* virtue could render her.

Their meetings were at first guarded and stolen ; but security, that parent of danger, drove them on by degrees to such noon-day rencounters, that her husband took the alarm, and, in concert with a favourite valet de chambre, easily detected the intrigue ; when her angelic Abbé was obliged to fly to England, and she, a poor young sinner ! (to use her own words,) was intimidated into this never-to-be-recalled step, in order to deliver herself from conjugal brow-beatings, and the clamors of her relations. She was introduced under a fictitious name, and, getting through her noviciate, was admitted into the society of holy virgins *like* herself.—“ But, said she, on concluding, I must tell you the true point of my repentance. My husband died three months after he had compelled me to take the

veil, and his coadjutor in my undoing, his trusty valet, was gathered up nearly about the same time for some misdemeanour, and lodged in the Bastile. Thus, continued she, I was buried most inhumanly, alive, to answer no end on earth, except, indeed that my dear Abbé, on these contingencies, returned to France, and is now an occasional confessor in this house—nay, to shew you the confidence I have in you, I will tell you, was the first father you ever opened your lips to as a good catholic—his visits soften the rigors of my confinement, but I, nevertheless, languish for the world, and die to be at Paris.”

What say you, my dear Nancy, to this slight specimen of my condition?—Your purity will, I know, shrink at the idea, and I shall draw tears of unavailing tenderness from your eyes. But check them, I intreat you, for two reasons: I am not, now that I once again correspond with you, very unhappy, and profess myself wholly unworthy your compassion; for, in defiance of all your sensible, your heart-searching arguments, I threw myself into the pit from whence there is no temporal resurrection, and deserve to waste my days in deploring the folly, ingratitude, and wildness, of my conduct.

Adieu, my dearest girl!—and should you be disposed, as a lively mark of your forgiving spirit, to favour your fallen Maria with a letter, our Niobe may be relied upon, and will as safely convey it to me, as she does my epistles to you.—In hopes, then, that the happiness

happinefs of hearing from you is in ftore for me,

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

I think, Madam, our friend's language proves her, as ſhe profeſſes herſelf, happier than uſual: but, if theſe prieſts are the libertines ſhe deſcribes them, I fear ſhe has very little chance for eſcaping their attacks; for, though no beauty, ſhe is one of your firſt-rate agreeables, which is often more attaching, if not equally attractive with the utmoſt ſymmetry of features; and has, both in her perſon and manner, a larger ſhare of the *je ne ſai quoi* than any woman I ever met with.

What would be the conſequence of a rude and infernal overture to ſuch a mind as hers, I am unable to conjecture; but, for my own part, I ſhould exult in ſeeing the mask torn from the face of hypocrify, and would moſt gladly lend a helping hand towards making the ſhame indeliſible.

But prudence and ſelf-preservation forbid every violent meaſure—*fineſſe*, not open oppoſition, will be our fort.—But we ſhall hear from time to time how matters go, and, I hope, be found too hard ſtill for theſe thorough-bred Jeſuits, who can ſo artfully clap their cloven foot behind them, and paſs themſelves off for the choſen prieſts of the Moſt High.

I proteſt to you, my dear Madam. I neither ſleep nor 'wake without horror; and, if any noiſe happens ſuddenly to ſtrike on my ear,

start and tremble, lest it should be found, on enquiry, to proceed from our Maria in distress. — Would she but alarm the convent, I would head a little army in her cause, and either rescue her or perish in the attempt—I am a very heroine, not in word, but deed, where my friend's honor or reputation is at stake. But Heaven avert the danger! and I will never act, notwithstanding all my quickness of spirit, inconsistently with my sex, or depart from the soft and amiable example held out by Miss Gerrard and yourself to,

A little fugitive, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XXIV.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

MY predictions, Madam, are fatal—But read your friend's letter, and then tell me, if I have not some extraordinary presentiments of events,

LET no one, my dear Nancy, henceforth presume upon their persons, or say, Thus and thus I shall pass unheeded by, and no one think it worth their while to mind me—Youth, nay, novelty alone, I am convinced, is a sufficient charm to expose the unsheltered female to the most mortifying attacks.

Can you credit it, my sweet girl? A priest, young and blooming as Hebe, with hallelujahs still warm on his lips, has more than once attempted

tempted to persuade me the heart ought not to remain unoccupied, though lodged in a convent.

But what love has he to offer to engage the affections?—In this place the *strainers* mentioned by Mr. Pope to *refine*, are wholly wanting; for the addresses of a priest are downright daring and unmannered licentiousness.—Heaven! that such houses can endure, when Sodom and Gomorrah are constituted the everlasting marks of God's vengeance on base and degenerate man!

I was so struck and confounded by the first *tender* overture, that I knew not what I said or did: my beads fell from my hands, my *Pater Noster* was suspended on my tongue, and I looked instantly for his cloven foot; but this young Beelzebub had most dexterously concealed it.

I returned to my cell all pensive and disgusted, and in my way meeting the beautiful sister I have so often mentioned, she had a key to my thoughts, and softly sighed out as I passed her, “Ah! what a world is this we live in! but God is just, and will not forsake those who trust in him.”

My cell is sacred—that is my highest, I had almost said my only felicity; but I could not pray, religion had lost all its graces, because one of its priests had proved himself infernal: so unable are we to separate persons from things, or persuade ourselves the fountain can be pure, when the stream is contaminated in its course. I wept and wrote, and wrote and wept—and have so far determined on my conduct,

duct, that this young Levite shall no more be the father I will confess to, though penances on penances should be the consequence of my refusal.

My good sense, my happy language, my *mind* (mark that!) was the object of his adoration, and to despoil, to vitiate, (oh, the fiend!) the blessed fruits of it. I shall not fail to be on my guard.

How long, my dearest girl, might I have lived in the *world* before I had sustained such an outrage?—The sanctity of my ear was never till now violated by the foul breath of the seducer: but let no one, for my sake, trust to fair seeming; it too often covers evil designing. But enough of this detested subject.

The beautiful nun and I are to spend an evening together, and chat over all the remarkable events of our lives: I long much to know how she was entrapped, though, perhaps, it was happy for mankind, that a nunnery should hide a shape and complexion, that, beheld, must be admired.

My saint, the Lady Abbess, who for artifice and penetration might challenge the first Jesuit of them all, does not approve, I am told, of the friendly glances exchanged between us.—Our hearts, my dear, are required to be empty of every thing save grief and licentiousness; and, to prevent every possible mischief on the part of the Little Niobe, she has bounds prescribed her, in the style of a state-prisoner, beyond which she is not to pass—But human nature is the same in
a con-

a convent as in the gayest metropolis : restraint quickens invention, and whatever is forbidden rises in its value far above its original standard.

She is often at the grate, and by her sweet, innocent, lively prattle, steals me, as it were, from myself ; and this, too, only in order to cover her deeper designs of stolen interviews : but we are all adepts in these strokes of *finesse*, which are so despicable in private families, but absolutely necessary to our existence in a nunnery.

She tells me every scholar has her particular favourite amongst the sisterhood, and will go the greatest length to oblige or serve them—and such abundant exercises in the science of deception do these favourites find them, that, when they return home to their honest, unsuspecting, but vain friends, they understand all the needful for preserving the surface fair, either in a single or married state—and no matter for the rest.

She, moreover, assures me, that the nuns, who are thorough-paced and can be relied on, have dispensations granted them for going out—revelling—and returning with minds and persons beyond measure corrupted.—Ought not, then, our moral writers much rather to guard us against the vices of a convent, than present us with such elaborate documents how to conduct ourselves through life, where two rules are sufficient to ensure all their lessons are capable of teaching us, namely, thinking right and meaning well ; for, as the former is a security against improper connexions, the latter keeps us from every

step that would dishonour our own hearts, or make us despised by mankind.

Nancy ! Nancy ! was I possessed of the richest chrysolite on earth, I would joyfully give it to be restored to society and you : but all is past, and death alone can untie the knot that fatally fixes me to the spot of my captivity.

I can now account, alas ! too well for the strict guard that is kept over the nuns, and the complicated springs which put them in motion : for, if they were left but a moment to their own government, we should have nothing but elopements. Let wicked rulers, however, guard or manage them as they may, I could forgive them every thing but the blasphemy they are guilty of in making their worst actions a compliment to the Deity, and, whilst they are engaged in diabolical pursuits, professing themselves to have no other concern than his honor and glory.

Thus, in the first instance, they trepan us into an adoption of faith which contradicts reason and humanity, and then, as a holy duty, prevent our exposing the impious deception, by keeping us at a distance from all but their own creatures ; for none can approach a sister without a proper passport, or convey a letter unsearched, unless, like our little friend, their will proves an overmatch for the convent's wisdom.

Let me know how my mother and her new family go on ; for, however she abandoned me, I cannot forget I am her child : besides, Nancy, she might be deceived, and fondly
conclude,

conclude, as this is a "bourn from which no traveller returns," that the whole life of a nun is like the outward path, the walk of invitation all strewed with flowers. But, above all things, I conjure you, if you should live to see any of her innocent offspring grow up, never permit them to enter these walls. She has understanding, and, where vanity is out of the question, (though it is to you alone I would write of her in this manner,) is alive to the feelings of nature—I therefore absolve you from every tie of secrecy: if it should become necessary, speak out; if it is the only means of snatching a helpless individual from never-ending mortification, reveal, proclaim all I have written to you. Before that period arrives, I may surely flatter myself, I shall be no more, and can therefore have no ill consequences to apprehend. But, to own the truth to you, I hope my deliverance is far less remote—Death, my dear girl, is sometimes imperceptible, though certain in its advances, and rather steals us from, than cuts off, our existence.—May his lenient hand be laid on me; and could I but be satisfied you would resign me as you ought, I should say this very night, with Cato, "'Tis indifferent in my choice to sleep or die."

For you other scenes than those of vice and horror are prepared—Enjoy them, my beloved girl, nor dare to oppose the will of Providence—Live the honor of our sex and admiration of the men, and shew what an accomplished woman should be and what reverence she is intitled

intitled to, and will always receive from liberal and distinguishing minds.

I fear I shall have ample matter for many future epistles from the beautiful nun : but I forbid your reading our convent relations with your handkerchief in your hand—her tears will be wiped away, her sufferings rewarded, her endurance compensated—Weep not, then, for her ; she is no mock saint, and will infallibly become an angel in Heaven.

I have not yet seen the good Mrs. Ashley, —her nerves, I find, are too weak to bear what her good-nature and friendship calls for trying an interview — I have, however, by means of our Niobe, obtained her pardon for my disregard of her advice, and kind endeavours to save me from my present state of repentance and humiliation ; and I am pitied and esteemed by her far beyond my merits.

As to Miss Smith, her affection, constancy and generalship, intitle her to canonization She is the star of my felicity—I gaze on her with delight, am warmed by her rays, and languish if four and twenty hours pass away without beholding her.

Pray explain to me how it comes to pass, that she is continued in the house so long beyond the time it was expected she would quit it ?— But I am sensible I owe all my supports and consolations to your unexampled friendship, and, I am, as I ought, both hers and
Your, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXV.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

THE interview is over, and the beautiful nun, next to yourself and our Niobe, is the beloved friend of my heart. Oh ! what a fate was hers — But as I know it must be much more agreeable to you to receive her history, than my reflections upon it, it shall be immediately presented for your perusal.

Had Louisa, the name of this heavenly girl, been an only child, the child of affectionate and liberal-minded parents, she must have been the happiest creature on earth ; for so perfectly does her soul and body correspond, that it is hard to determine which is most amiable — but it was her misfortune to be the youngest daughter of a numerous family, and born, as it were, out of due time ; for her mother had flattered herself she should have no more children, for several years before her birth ; — and with the additional sin, as she grew up, of excelling all her brothers and sisters on her head, it is not wonderful she should be found in the way.

Lady V—r, her mother, was a woman violent in her attachments, and violent in her resentments — and as Louisa had not the felicity of being an object of her love, she was most unjustly the object of her hatred. Her reception on her entrance into the world was cold — through her infancy she was neglected, and
when

when arrived at a womanly period, was treated with great unkindness.

Unable to account for this cruel conduct, and modest enough to suspect herself of some capital deficiencies for pleasing—whilst her sisters amused themselves in a thousand little coquetries—she industriously filled up her time with music, painting, and literature, in order, if possible, to compensate, by acquired perfections, for what nature had denied her; and, by making herself entertaining as well as useful, find out the way of unlocking her relations' hearts.

But what was her distress and astonishment, when, instead of producing the desired effect, she plainly perceived she was more than ever disliked!—She wept, and, as grief and piety are kind of twin sisters, began to seek that consolation in religion the world cannot give.

This was the very thing sought for by her barbarous relations, who having too much honor and too much justice to *compel* her to bury herself in a convent, could only contrive to render it her own act and deed, from disappointed hopes and an uncomfortable situation.

A priest, a dependent of her father's, was instructed to fill her young mind with every enthusiastic notion of the beauty of holiness, and the pleasures of a convent;—and, as her brothers and sisters never condescended to unbend their brow, or her father and mother to relax their austerity, she at length caught the contagion, and begged she might be permitted to pass her life within these walls.

Having

Having once brought her to this point her artful family began to caress her.—It was a divine impulse—she was the daughter of heaven, and merited the applause, the reverence of mankind—Her dress was now changed from that of humility to a dress of splendor equal to her high birth, and she was carried about in a triumphal manner, as the elected, the destined bride of God.

Her beauty was the universal theme all over Paris, and no one was at a loss to guess the family motives for hiding such loveliness from the world; but, as fathers and mothers, in France, are arbitrary in the disposal of their children, not an individual thought fit to interfere, or once oppose the pious election she had made. In the course of this display of the young saint, which was intended to prove that no constraint whatever was laid on her inclinations, an English nobleman, then on his travels, happened to behold her.

He endeavoured, on repeated occasions, but all in vain, to speak to her—her *kind* relations left not one avenue open, and he was compelled to sigh and complain in private.—As a forlorn hope, however, the week before she was to be brought to enter on her noviciate, he waited on lady V—r, and intreated her to bestow her daughter's hand upon him; but his offer was deemed an insult, a sort of blasphemy, as she was circumstanced: and on the appointed morning she took up her residence in this baneful mansion, where every thing was calculated to captivate her imagination, and extinguish any soft wish this young nobleman's visible attention

attention and admiration of her might have given rise to. Her relations, nevertheless, had their doubtings and apprehensions, on which account it was, that, tho' she had been received into the convent before I arrived, I never, till the conclusion of her noviciate, had a sight of her, it being thought adviseable to keep her in the interior parts of the house, and in the company of select nuns, so long as it might be probable my Lord would bear her in mind, or be incited to interrupt her pious intentions.

From what I can collect, she *had* some little conflict in her heart between her love of life and her love of heaven, and could have been content to separate herself from her envious relations, by a trip to England with his Lordship, instead of bidding a final adieu to society.

She, nevertheless, (as I was an eye witness) took the veil, and, it seems, this nobleman was one of the many spectators on that pompous occasion.—She confesses, too, he caught her eye, but denies that his presence gave her one pang; for she has no idea, she says, of those attachments that have not friendship for their basis, and thinks hers a light and easy sacrifice, to give up a man, agreeable as he is in his person, that she never exchanged a vow with.

Educated as I have described, Louisa would have been one of the happiest and sincerest devotees on earth, if convents were what they are described by artifice, and believed by those of easy faith—but the wickedness of those who she expected would have shewn her the way to
the

the glorious mansions for which she had renounced all worldly gratifications, soon alarmed and disgusted her. The more she thought, the more she was puzzled to reconcile vice with virtue, and the arch-fiend with the deity; and so powerful was the horror that seized her mind on her first coming to a true knowledge of her condition, that she was more than half tempted to add the character of the Roman heroine to that of the genuine devotee, and by dagger or poison defeat the diabolical schemes that were laid for her destruction.

But the Fates had otherwise decreed— I was on the verge of increasing the number of holy virgins, and she promised herself a sympathizing friend, a sincere partner in adversity in me: nor shall she be disappointed—I will love her, soothe her, and, if possible, protect her from violence. But violence, it seems, is the last resource of priestly outrage, for there is danger in it—and these holy seducers chuse rather to trust to time, dissembling arts, or some unguarded moment, for success, than bring their reputation into hazard.

But they have every thing, my dear, in their own power—for under a million of false pretences, as penances, mortifications, &c. the most remote recesses of the convent, where the light never dawns, or unhallowed feet tread, become the temporary residence of the defenceless female, who, instead of serving or appeasing her God, there finds herself the prey of the most infernal of men.

The sweet Louisa was, it seems, a few weeks ago, plunged into the deepest apprehensions,

sions, lest some such injunction awaited her, as every *finesse* that language or manners are capable of, had been practised towards her undoing, by one reverend father who suddenly disappeared she could not conceive why, until she was informed he was summoned to Rome on some religious account: but she trembles every hour, lest either he should return, or be succeeded by one of the same dire complexion, to torment and insult her.

I bid her be of good cheer; for, let what will be the consequence, she shall be so closely attended by me, that the best-concerted plan of wickedness shall fall to the ground—and I will keep my word with her.

I told her the overture I had received—and we now laughed, now wept, now sympathized, and now encouraged each other, till in the end we felt a new spirit revive within our bosoms; and, extravagant as the hope appears, actually had hope we should live to triumph over these dark magicians, and obtain our enlargement.

Ah! my Nancy, should it be possible for us to meet again!—The everlasting curtain has been dropped between us, 'tis true, yet our minds are not disunited, our correspondence is re-established—My heart overflows with tender regret, soft recollection, and fond remembrance of what we have been—But we will not be deceived—Our correspondence is all the intercourse we must expect on this side the grave. Had my Lord loved, as I should have done, this fairest of Nature's works, the all-accomplished Louisa, he would not have
suffered

suffered fourteen months to elapse without taking one step for her deliverance.—He has forgot her, forsook her, and the ray I caught is now wholly shut out by reason and reflection.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XXVI.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

WHAT busy scenes a convent affords! —Miss Gerrard, my dear Madam, is so close shut up, that her pen and ink, which I contrived to help her to, are become useless, and I am commanded to write the *why* and *wherefore*, which are as follows :

The beautiful Louisa, as you have already been informed, some small time before she quitted the world, was seen and admired by an English nobleman, who offered himself and fortune to her relations, with every stipulation respecting religious matters, to obtain her ; but in vain. Jealousy and pride were their governing principles of action ; and to blight, not display, this lovely flower, the wish of their heart. He was therefore disgracefully refused.

But Englishmen, Madam, (I grieve they were ever enemies to America,) are not easily repulsed—Though the walls of a convent are, as Shakespeare says of the Capulet gardens, “ high and hard to climb, and the place death
to

to those that venture unauthorised within them," yet this enterprising young spark, disguised in a female dress, with a black calash over his face, was conducted by a lady of spirit in the neighbourhood, who sometimes visits our Superior, into the very parlour.

My Lord's person favoured his designs; for he is within the middle size, slim and genteel, his complexion fair and florid. — I happened to be on the spot when he was shewn in, and felt I knew not what of fearful apprehension (for he appeared to be an uncommon visitant); but every thing passed off to his wish. The beautiful nun was, by the Lady Abbess's complaisance, called to the grate, and he feasted his eyes and ears above a quarter of an hour with her face and voice. At length, finding she was about to retire, the wicked wretch (though I confess it was only repelling fraud, by fraud, and conforming to the necessities of the place) advanced with an air of piety to the grate, and presenting an open slip of paper, besought sister Louisa to let the unhappy one therein described be remembered in her prayers, and the prayers of the holy sisterhood. Then resuming his seat, and putting a white handkerchief to his eyes, intreated his fair conductress to explain the cause of his tears, and the request he had made to that heavenly virgin.

A story of an hour long was thereupon told the Lady Abbess, of a young perverse one on the point of marrying a heretic, (a very near relation of the afflicted lady's,) and throwing herself out of the pale of the true church.

The Lady Abbess, whose tears are perfectly obedient

obedient to her commands, wept at the narrative, began to cross herself, and tell over her beads; and they parted the best friends imaginable.—Louisa, who had a somewhat of presentiment of the affair, would not trust herself to examine the paper until she arrived at her cell—when she learned that his Lordship was resolved to undertake impossibilities for her rescue—level the walls of her prison, or break their tenfold doors, rather than know such loveliness languishing in obscurity—concluding the whole with a promise of seeing her, and accounting for his long, long seeming neglect of her.

Miss Gerrard contrived (for this is a particular week of godliness) just to give me the outlines of the business, and will write herself as soon as she is able.—O Madam! we will all elope together—I mean, Maria, Louisa, and myself; for I will not remain a moment after them, and it shall go hard but our friend shall be of the party—Providence has hitherto done its own work by me, an humble instrument; but think what an auxiliary I have obtained.—Yet though my Lord's abilities may exceed mine, I cannot call it presumption to say in love and inclination, he cannot go beyond me.—I am beside myself with hope and joy—Pray let her not want a letter of encouragement and exhortation from you, and leave me to deliver it, and back it with my persuasions.—Now is the good, the only time; and if we fail to make our advantage of it, we shall have reason to rue as long as we live.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

L E T T E R XXVII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

*Vows of virginity should well be weigh'd;
They oft are cancell'd, though in convents made.*

LOUISA, my dear Nancy, nay, your friend, is so unhinged by the incident the good Niobe has informed you of, that we know not how to contain ourselves. But have we not been betrayed, deceived within these walls, and stand we not on the absolute brink of the most dire evils?

Louisa's person is so abundantly beautiful, that I should have pitied these wolves in sheep's cloathing, if their admiration of it had proved their torment; but even I myself cannot escape, except by flight. And we have settled it, that the world with all its vanities, its corruptions, cannot give us worse scenes than what this convent hourly presents us with: the very attitudes of devotion, the very tears of penitence, my Nancy, are only so many new displays of the devoted one's charms, in the eyes of these ghostly fathers, who pray whilst their hearts are agitated by unholy love, and impose penances on their disciples, whilst they are planning schemes to engage their dishonorable approbation—In a word, we see, and shudder at, their zeal in the arch-fiend's cause. A victim to sacrilegious licentiousness is a horrible idea to us; and to receive, for a gallant,

gallant, the man from whom we are daily soliciting benedictions and absolutions, an article of Christian faith we are unable to subscribe to.

Be the event, however, what it may, I rejoice my little stipend has not been locked up by any act of mine that is not reversible with my change of situation: the convent was to receive it for my use; but if I can contrive to quit the convent, I shall have use for it elsewhere, and I think neither law nor equity can set up a clause against me.

Louisa's establishment is quite on another principle: she had only presents to bestow, and they are gone for ever—Had mine, indeed, been other than an annuity terminating with my life, I doubt not but I should have eagerly endowed the house with it in my day of infatuation, and left myself wholly destitute.

What will my mother say, if I should get at large!—Will she not accuse me of perfidy, of prophanation—But, I believe, after burying myself so much to her satisfaction, it will be unsafe, consequently unwise, to trust her with the knowledge of my resurrection—I must, therefore, borrow some French name, and rely on obscurity for the rest. And what, then, Nancy, becomes of my annuity? If I fly from hence, I much fear I shall lose it. The thought is distressing, mortifying; but, should that prove the case, I must constitute myself a tax on the generosity of my friends.

Louisa has, it seems, a near and worthy relation in England; a refugee, who, by flying from France, fled from a very considerable fortune,

fortune, but, by marrying a man of great property, and surviving her children and husband, is now possessed of three thousand pounds a year in the West of England.—To her she means to repair immediately on her enlargement, and flatters herself, that her aunt's liberality will render her hand more worthy of her noble lover's acceptance than if he had received it from her father and mother.

I am sorry to find myself so elated by any incident; but my soul, Nancy, is on the wing—I am impatient to find a spot of rest, of hospitality; and the Little Niobe is to be the companion of our flight. I lie awake whole hours, anticipating the transports of our first interview, and the days and years we shall pass in talking over the dangers we have seen, and the deliverance we have experienced.

What will be his Lordship's next step it is impossible to conjecture;—but, I think, we may reasonably give him credit for perseverance now he is once started: nor will this be the first convent an Englishman has robbed, although so well secured by art, and so faithfully superintended by superstition, besides the stronger reasons I have given you, namely, that priests have eyes and hearts as well as other men, and that, notwithstanding they may dedicate their persons to celibacy, they do not conceive themselves bound to offer up their inclinations on any shrine.

But how will the courteous and enterprising knight be astonished, when he finds, instead
of

of one distressed damsel, that his shoulders are to be saddled with a brace? for Louisa declares she will not fly without me, and hers is the voice of truth and fidelity.

I am now no longer a catholic—the mysteries, the ceremonies, the pantomimical part I wholly reprobate; but the zeal of good men, the warmth of honest devotion, the humility of penitence, and the practice of self-examination, I will adopt, I will retain—We, my dear, on a cool and candid investigation of the *tout-ensemble* when we meet, will draw the line, live the life of duty as we go along, pray without the help of beads, praise without external aids, and bend our hearts without torturing our bodies, chuse and refuse as reason and morality dictate, and hypocrisy's veil shall be rent asunder.

I should have told you, that, as it was no uncommon thing for the Lady Abbess to treat her favourite female visitor with a sight of the angelic nun, as Louisa is called, we were not surprised to find her summoned to the grate.

In her return, however, I was struck by her flushed cheek and quick step, and followed her instinctively to her cell, when, scarcely able to keep from fainting, she put the note she had received into my hands, and we gazed on each other for a second in silent astonishment.

As the least interested, or, more properly, the least-agitated party, I recovered the power of speech first, and congratulated her upon her prospect of deliverance—"This, my
G dear,

dear, said I, you may be sure of that whatever spot your may be cast on, it cannot be worse than this."

"That is a solemn, a serious truth, replied she—but there is one condition on which alone I will consent to break through what I once thought to be holy, but now find to be mock vows; for, unless you accompany me, and prove to me, by flying, that you conceive it justifiable to deliver yourself from the fell gripe of devils in human form, and throw yourself on the ocean of the world, I will embrace death as the last, the only resource of helpless, persecuted, betrayed innocence.

I was pleased with this instance of tenderness, good opinion, and friendship, and promised her one fate should unite and govern us to the end of our lives: and thus you find me ready to rush forth into those social scenes which I so rashly and precipitately renounced.

The friendly Niobe will write to you on any exigence—And it is settled, that, should my Lord's ingenuity effect a means of our enlargement, she shall retire, *a la mode Française*, the day before, and wait for us on the Dover side of the channel.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

L E T T E R XXVIII.

From the Same to the Same.

THREE days of painful suspense are now at an end—My Lord a lover!—does love, my Nancy, move on such leaden wings—No invention, no plot, no attempt to redeem us from the jaws of the destroyer!—Ah me!—sure rather he ought, Perseus like, to have, long before this, mounted his Pegasus, and dispatched the monster that withholds his Louisa from his wishes.

But, perhaps, I wrong him; to work securely, we must work circumspectly, and great events are not born of a day. I, nevertheless, must think, that I should have done something worthy my prowess and my mistress's thanks, ere such an age as three whole days had expired.

I am for correcting the infernal torments, in consequence of what I endure, and, instead of everlasting thirst, binding down Mr. Tantalus to the wheel of everlasting suspense.

My holy admirer has set me a lesson I shall not easily learn: the theme is, Whether the deepest contrition for sin is not more salutary to the soul, than self-justification and confidence in our own merits?—The dial, my dear, speaks not, but it makes shrewd signs—I am now behind the curtain, you know, and can infer the motive from the argument, and discover all the before hidden springs that put these dark purposes into operation.

Two scholars from Ireland have entered on their noviciate ; and we nuns, to keep us under proper decorum, are arranged in classes, over each of which there is a trusty superior : so that though what we do and say appears self-dictated, it is the result of pre-instruction and pre-consultation.

Our Argus's have their eyes every where upon us, and are ready with their specious interpretations—If we look pensive, it is called holy zeal ; if we weep, they are tears that delight, and our sighs infallibly waft to heaven.—Thus the poor deluded one is led on by an *ignis fatuus*, until the noose is fitted to her neck, from which no human power can release her.

And lest at night, with the honest artifice of Penelope, we should contrive to undo what we have done in the day, all but such as are styled the house-nuns (a set of infatuated wretches, who, in order to get to heaven, send both their souls and bodies to the devil) are locked up and separated from the novices, by a door of such enormous strength and magnitude, that I never behold it turning on its hinges without recollecting the gate described by Milton, which opened with so fearful a sound, and out of which the enemy of man-kind issued with sin and death in his train.

Our Niobe appeared yesterday, for the first time, at high-mass—I trembled at the sight of her, though my heart told me she was secured by a seven-fold shield against the wiles of the sisterhood, and the poison of priestly documents. She soon, however, explained her conduct to my entire satisfaction, by
informing

informing me, with the usual signal, that she had a letter for me, which I was dexterous enough, unperceived, to convey into my pocket.—But such a letter!—Oh, thou of little faith!—Can you think for a moment, situated as I am, that I want any arguments but the dangers which surround me, and the testimony of a good conscience, to incite me to fly this pandemonium.

I devoted myself to God—my vow had no clause that should render me the slave of man—He has been pleased, almost miraculously, to hold out a prospect of deliverance; and if I embrace, if I pursue it not, conclude me fallen in love with brothel-scenes and Bacchanalian revels.

By what a chain of events has my life been governed! My mother un—Well, we will say only unkind—my education a simple rural one—my attachments solely to you—our separation the first real pang of my existence—my conveyance to this place compulsive—my treatment delusive—my dedication of my self voluntary—my disappointment grievous—my horrors, my apprehensions insupportable—my flight the last effort of nature and of reason to save myself from ruin. How, or wherein, then, can I be to blame? Heaven is my witness, if I had had only the toils of servitude, or the scantiness of provision to complain of, I would have patiently endured, and looked up through all to that place of rest which the good sooner or later arrive at: but vice was the hydra I meant to shun, and religion the exercise I sought to engage in; and,

Nancy, I have transplanted myself from the pure spot you occupy to the hot-bed of the former, and involved myself in the juggler's trick of the latter.

* * * *

A young priest, the high-priest of Apollo for aught I know, is arrived at our convent, with letters of superabundant credit from the Pope.

He has visited the religious houses far and near, and is commissioned to see that no errors are crept into the *externals* of their devotion.—A solemn mass is therefore appointed, at which he is to assist, and will go over the confession and enjoin the penances, previous to the holy week, which is not now far distant.

This is, beyond measure, unlucky; for every moment of our time will be taken up, and our deliverer find it difficult to communicate his generous schemes to us.—I forget, however, that our Niobe will always be on the watch for us.

How dearly ought we all to love this good, disinterested girl, for her steady attachment and unremitted services!—But she is blessed with a mind of the noblest cast, and, if characteristic of her country, the females there are as great as any Roman *she's* the world ever produced.

As to state determinations, I know nothing of their merits, nor shall I ever give myself the trouble to enquire into them.—The only sound policy, and true measure of right and wrong,

wrong, is, to do justice, and love mercy — But, for Miss Smith's sake, I cannot help admiring the spirit with which the American ladies (believing themselves aggrieved) resolved to renounce tea-drinking, and, doubt not, if occasions such as we meet with on historical record, were to occur, that, actuated by the same glorious principles, they would suffer and effect all the ancient matrons or maidens did or were forward to do, for the safety, honour, and welfare of their country.

Having what I have on my mind, what a blessed virgin I shall be to join in the angelic procession, and sing hymns of divine joy and rapture! — But so it must be — arrayed in the whiteness of innocence — our veils becomingly disposed, our beads depending from our wrists, our *croix* on our heart, and with tapers in our hands — we shall at night repair to the *Sanctum Sanctorum* of this house, there to *do over* our religious exercises before this holy ambassador, who will report us to the father of the church, and, without question, abundantly promote our salvation.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XXIX.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

I AM frightened to death! — This holy father, received with such *eclat*, and whose fame for divine graces is exalted to the skies,

is no other, my dear Madam, than Lord D. — What will become of us, if he is discovered? Our sweet nuns will be burnt alive, and the Bastille hide his miserable head for ever.

How could he be so imprudent, so daring! and, then, to suppose my nerves properly strung to sustain the shock of a discovery! — I thank him for his fine opinion of me — nor do I know when I shall be collected.

To own the truth, I am now writing out my agitation on paper, that I may be able to walk forth without suspicion.

Last night was a night of religious rendezvous (if I may use the expression); for, as I have repeatedly observed to you, it is not the Catholic Faith, but its hypocritical professors, I mean to ridicule; and feeling myself much out of humour, and much in the way, I retired earlier to bed than is my usual custom; a circumstance which caused me to rise before my usual time in the morning, when Providence put it in my heart to walk into the garden

It is a beautiful spot, and has numberless recesses, intended I suppose for contemplation, confession, or other holy *tête-à-têtes*.

In one of these I sat down; but my imagination had scarcely transported me to my dear country, before I heard a gentle foot-step, which I concluded was that of one of the nuns, and renewed my reverie, when suddenly the young father, our new visitor, presented himself, and, addressing me with "Be not surprised, fair Lady," effectually roused me, and made
me

me dread some important secret lurked in his bosom.

“Be not surprised,” repeated he—“I am not what I seem, but, instead of a priest, the most tender and faithful of lovers —You have a friend ———”

I was struck dumb with astonishment, joy, apprehension—but, recovering the faculty of speech, “I understand you, Sir, said I; you are a bold adventurer, and I hope not insensible of the danger of delay.—What schemes have you then formed?—When are they to be carried into execution—I shall never have a moment’s peace till you have got clear of these walls; for there is death in a thousand shapes for those that violate its laws.”

“You need not, Madam, bear so hard on my conduct to convince me of the necessity there is to be expeditious—Do you do your part, and be assured I will do mine—Inform my Louisa who I am, and intreat her to receive a visit from me in her cell at midnight (for that is the only safe or possible hour of conference), that I may explain both my past and present conduct to her full satisfaction.”

Here our interview broke off, and, you may suppose, I was beyond measure impatient to see our friends—I did see them in due time, Madam, but whether they are most delighted or terrified at the tidings I gave them, I am unable to determine.

Upon my word, his Lordship is a very handsome man, and I cannot but believe him, from his air and manner, a man of understanding; at least, he appeared to me in a most ad-

vant geous light, from being the angel of promise, the only possible author of our Maria's deliverance.

I wish I could be a spectator of their tender interview—He seems to have a particular talent for saying soft and agreeable things.—Happy Louisa! how will all your mortifications be relieved, your sorrows done away!—He looks already like a bridegroom—Pray Heaven no fatal star may predominate, but that his success may equal the greatness, the nobleness of his undertaking, and that I may live to be witness of their mutual felicity.

You will receive a speedy account from some of our pens, of all that passes between the trio, (for Miss Gerrard will be of the party,) as well as of the consequential measures. I congratulate you, my dear Madam, on the near approach of an event, which hope itself, a few weeks ago, could have no idea of, and which human ingenuity must have despaired of effecting.

I am, &c. &c.

A SMITH.

LETTER XXX.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

NEVER was surprise equal to Louisa's and mine, on discovering, by means of our sweet Niobe, that this priest was no other than Lord D—. Impatient to hear what had prevented

prevented his taking a single step for her deliverance in all the months that had elapsed since her confinement, and no less impatient to learn what happy scheme he had now formed for that purpose, our minds were kept on the rack until the hour of appointment arrived. My fair friend had her little delicacies about her—she wished for liberty and safe convoy as warmly as myself—but as there was a *tacit* stipulation on her part to repay the obligation, and my Lord was an intire stranger to her, except in title and person, she knew not how, she said, to receive him, or encourage him to persevere in his bold enterprise.

I repeated the favourable report I had received from Niobe of his address and understanding, and begged she would not let an unseasonable nicety rob her of the only opportunity of her life for defeating the base and cruel designs of her known enemies. She smiled at my eagerness to catch at the twig Providence seemed to hold out to us, and assured me she would do every thing consistent with her honour and happiness, to serve, to save, both me and herself. “But Maria, continued she, suppose my heart should revolt at the idea of accepting this man for my husband, would you wish me to fall so low as to deceive, and abuse, the generosity I ought to reward?”

She then intreated me to see him first, and discourse him on the subject of his views and expectations concerning her, and touch, though tenderly, on the possibility that on a farther

farther acquaintance they might disapprove each other : but I conceived, if he had eloquence, he would be the best advocate in the common cause, and therefore besought her to abide his coming, and rest her opinion of his merits on the *how* he acquitted himself on this occasion.

Light as fairy footsteps did this man of men trip along the cloisters, insomuch that the first notice we had of his arrival was a gentle tap at the door of Louisa's cell, which discomposed us both, but from different motives ; she fearing, I hoping, every thing from this rencounter.

On opening the door, he bowed, blushed, and entered : the awkwardness of true passion tied up his tongue, and Louisa was too much agitated to be capable of relieving him, I then was obliged to break the ice ; and, having accommodated him with a seat, told him I was astonished at his courage in taking up his residence within our walls.

“ From the first hour I beheld that lady, replied he, bowing gracefully to Louisa, I considered no price too great to purchase her esteem, and sought every means to tell her the tender sentiments with which she had inspired me : but was not only disappointed in every attempt, but despised and rejected by her relations, who tore her from the world, and rendered her inaccessible to my prayers. I was a spectator of their triumph, and my final defeat—but Heaven took cognizance of the vows I offered up, that my life, and fortune, should be employed in obtaining her enlargement

ment, unless the fetters of enthusiasm should unfortunately rivet down her mind beyond all power of conviction.

“ With this resolution I quitted the choir, and spent the succeeding night in idle plans. The morning dawned, and I arose in a state of melancholy undecision ; for my reason told me, I had far greater difficulties to contend with, than scaling these walls, or making a passage for the woman of my heart into that world she had so fatally renounced.

“ Had the convent been situated on the coast, the way had been, comparatively speaking, open before me ; but such is the internal policy of the French nation, that no passengers whatever can obtain, unquestioned, egress or ingress with the several towns : who then could flatter himself with bearing off a prize of such a critical nature as devotee, undiscovered and undetected ?

“ This thought tortured me through the second night of your imprisonment, Madam ; for during your noviciate, I was convinced no one useful step could be taken, for I was informed spies were constantly about you, and the force of persuasion such, that your inclinations were warped to the wishes of my enemies, and that by a premature stroke I should only undo myself. Hence the months dragged on in slow and painful succession, sometimes in England, sometimes at Paris, until your assumption of the veil gave me hopes that the fascination would cease, and your ear and heart unreluctantly attend to my friendly proposals. But, from the anguish of my soul
on

on a review of the impediments to my undertaking, before I could bring my matters in any degree in train, I was seized with a fever: a gentleman, however, with whom I had become acquainted at Paris, by his kind and unremitting visits and attentions during my disorder, won me to an unreserved confidence of the cause of that uneasiness which so apparently hung upon my spirits. He was, ladies, a man of great good-nature and great understanding; he soothed, he consoled me, and, with a degree of address I shall ever remember with gratitude, suggested the only possible method of coming at a knowledge of Louisa's opinion of the sisterhood, into which she was elected: and this was, to repair with all expedition to Rome, and, by dint of bribes and his interest with a celebrated cardinal, under a feigned name, and in the character of a private gentleman that had fallen in love with the holy religion, get myself constituted a priest.

"To Rome we went, where, by his direction, every thing conspired to promote the desired purpose; I was accepted into the brotherhood, and bought the honors with which I entered this mansion: and in order the more effectually to accomplish my wishes, my friend offered likewise to become a *pro-tempore* father of the church, and now officiates at a neighbouring convent, from whence I hope to translate him in a few weeks, and introduce him to a lady he is prepared to admire.

"When all these preparatory steps were happily taken, I had a secret foreboding; that
for

for the better security from my probable attempts, you was removed to some other religious house, on which account, I got myself admitted in masquerade, through my friend's influence over the lady who brought me into the parlour, and dexterously procured me a sight of you; for I had the most fearful apprehensions of being put on a false scent, and losing my precious time. I saw you, Madam, and immediately availed myself of my holy function; nor shall my utmost invention be unexercised, in order to conclude, as happily as I have begun, my operations. —The hypocrisy, the vice, of religious domes cannot now be unknown to you; and purity, like yours, must shrink with horror from the view. —The same cardinal that procured me the Pope's countenance and favour, at my request, called off your late confessor, to make room for me; nor do I doubt but he will open a door of admission for his other new convert, my generous coadjutor, as soon as it is convenient. Thus, Madam, have I contrived to smooth the way before me, and, by having the care of your conscience, shall have the power of guarding you from mortifications, and, at least, rendering your life more agreeable than it can have been since your taking the veil, until, in the end, I flatter myself, I shall engage your good opinion, and strike out a method of breaking your chains."

Louisa, with downcast eyes, professed herself much indebted to him for the trouble he had been at on her account; acknowledged her dislike of a convent, and ardent desire to escape

escape its dangers, and snares ; but sweetly intimated that she was sorry she had nothing in her power, but prayers, to offer in return for such an act of generosity as no words could characterise. His Lordship *politely* bowed on her hand, but, I suppose thought it best to make no reply ; for, as it might have seemed presuming to claim, so it would have been dishonest to disclaim, the reward he aspired to—and I could perceive his behaviour pleased her.

Yet, advanced thus far, I can see little prospect of our deliverance.—What can his friend do, beyond occupying his sacred function lightly and wantonly, however innocent or laudable the motive on which it was assumed ?

Such good intelligence did Lord D—— obtain, that Niobe's friendship for his fair mistress was not unknown to him, and he has, he tells us, set her down on the whitest leaf of his tablets.

His notice of her, and her approbation of it, will be highly agreeable to the house, as to conquer her obstinacy would do its inhabitants so much honor. The good Mrs. Ashley, too, will be suspected of partiality for the religion she abhors, and we shall be tied fast in a knot of honest dissimulation.—The recollection, however, of the barriers by which we are surrounded, the prying intendants of every town between this spot and the sea-side, has plunged me into despair ; and, I fear, in spite of all my high-raised hopes, my delightful expectations—we shall never meet again.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

L E T T E R X X X I.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

WHAT a change of scene, my dear Madam, has a few days produced! We are all as comfortable as may be, and my Lord is the blessed cause — How, then, can I behold him without the warmest gratitude, approbation, and affection? He met me this morning, by accident, in the garden, and in the softest accents enquired how I did: I know not what I replied; but, if my heart and tongue had any correspondence, I am satisfied, I was not behind-hand with him in courtesy or good-will.

After some little trifling chat, he stopt suddenly, and, gazing at me for a moment, said, “You are not unlike my Louisa in person as well as mind.”

I felt my cheek glow with pleasure, though my conscience smote me at the time; for I could certainly never deserve so high a compliment. — “The turn of your face, continued he, is the same, and your complexion is very little inferior; I should therefore have loved you, my young friend, for the resemblance, if I had had no other motive.”

I have revolved the matter in my mind; for methinks I should not like the deliverer of our Maria to be found a dissembler, on any occasion, and really begin much rather to believe than discredit his observation. — Louisa’s capital

capital beauties, Madam, are her eyes, her mouth, and elegant shoulders—not a word of all which fell from his lips—and you cannot imagine how much I am grown in favour with myself, in consequence of this unexpected notice from so fine a gentleman—He ought to have been an American—Mrs. Ashley is quite charmed with him—yet our friend seems to speak as if Louisa had her doubts and her waverings — I'll assure her—what would she have ?

I have stayed in this house to some happy purpose at last ; but I thought, indeed, when I was first told of the affair, that no man alive could forget so beautiful a creature, and I rejoice to find I was not mistaken.

I shall now never fail to attend at the chapel ; for my Lord, who is the most graceful figure you ever beheld, and is, moreover, as every body allows, an accomplished orator, will always assist the household priest at every religious assembling—What a wonderful incident it is, that this amiable sister should have been thrown into the same convent with your friend — that this noble fellow should be so constant in his attachment to her, and that his fortune and talents should enable him to suit the *sop* to every Cerberus he has to deal with !

I have heard of convent-adventures, and convent-scenes, but supposed them imaginary draughts, and proofs alone of the ingenuity of authors. But these fictions are realized in my Lord's person ; with this difference, that intrigue is the object with the several pretended friars for visiting the sisterhood, the tenderest
and

and most delicate affection the axis of Lord D——'s conduct; and may his success be equal to the greatness of his undertaking!

I write to you, Madam, whilst the nuns and priests are at dinner; for so important is the task I am engaged in, that I consider myself obliged to be always on the watch to receive directions for my steps, or be otherwise serviceable as I may have the power.—Pray, oh! pray incessantly for the rescue of our friend.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XXXII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

MY Lord's friend has not only got footing in this house, but has already rendered himself a first-rate favourite with all its inhabitants.

You have seen the print of Abelard—Mr. Venols's face, except the grief, is the exact resemblance of it—such intelligence, such—but I need not trouble you with a description of his features, after what I have written above on the subject.

There is a something inconceivably pleasing in his address and manners; and, as he happens to be my confessor, I have opportunities of conversing with him from which my friends are excluded—But what really attaches me is,
that,

that, instead of making a jest of religion, he laments that money is the key to the most dangerous indulgencies, and can wash the Æthiop white, in the opinion of the holy See, if only properly circulated.

He assures me, he should never have embarked with my Lord, but from the double motive of justice and humanity: the fame of Louisa's beauty taught him to feel for her despairing lover, and the outrage her mind had sustained induced him to become the champion of her liberty. I shudder, Nancy, to think what impositions young women are exposed to by the very step their goodness of heart prompts them to take for their protection and happiness; for—could you conceive, can you believe such a thing?—many gay, giddy debauchees, by the dint of *gold*, have been suffered to personate and act as father-confessors, and, I doubt not, participated the triumph over reason, virtue and religion,

The scheme these worthy gentlemen have formed, does not, according to my notions, promise much success.—It is, after the example of friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, to lock up our senses for a few hours by a drug properly prepared, and convey us to the Dormitory for dead, where our returning *life* is to be awaited by one or other of them, and some happy device hit upon to get us off from this hateful land.

But if, as I am now satisfied, such strictness prevails around, how shall we be able to elude the vigilance of magistracy, if we should even contrive to break through these walls?

There

There is, nevertheless, something soothing in the idea that we are at present in safe and honourable hands, and not within the possibility of being betrayed, unless we betray ourselves.

The Little Niobe, I much fear, will be a greater sufferer by her generosity; for her young heart is surely captivated, though she knows it not, by my Lord—When she mentions him, her whole countenance is animated. What pity it is that her inexperience should mistake love for friendly attachment. I would caution her, but am apprehensive of alarming her too quick sensibility, and probably depriving us of our sheet-anchor. She has great good sense, and unbounded liberality of soul, and will, therefore, I hope, when she comes to a knowledge of her disease, apply the necessary remedies for its cure.

I am mortified at the cross-purposes we are playing; for, had Mr. Venols inspired her with a tender passion, (and, in my opinion, he far exceeds my Lord,) all might have been well; for the difference in their age is on the right side, and, some three or four years hence, would rather have been an agreeable than an unpleasing circumstance.

Louisa is more pensive than usual, but from what *penchant* I cannot discover. She professes a high esteem for Lord D——, who absolutely adores her, and is, as I tell him, the greatest idolator in the whole house.

Niobe, with the frankness of your undesigning minds, often, it seems, converses with the Right Honourable priest, hears him sigh for his

his Louisa's liberty with unaffected concern, and agrees with him that she is an angel on earth.

He mentions her in terms of friendship and approbation, praises her heart, her head, nay, her person, for being a faint resemblance of his beloved.—Ah! Nancy, what will become of the poor girl, if he talks to her in this strain? yet how to prevent it I own myself wholly at a loss.

Our household father is laid up with the gout; it is therefore expected that some brother of his own chusing will officiate for him.—I wish the contingency could be guarded against, for who knows what discoveries his visits may lead to, or what mortifying consequence it may be productive of.

I languish for enlargement, and feel my fetters grow every hour more and more insupportable. My Lord and his friend declare, that, if they cannot bear us hence, they will live and die with us, for that the world has nought to compensate the loss of our engaging society.

I own to you, Nancy, I am obliged to have recourse to all my prudence, resolution, and principles, to keep my heart from straying—Venols is the only man I ever beheld that I could love—but he is here come too late—my vow is irrevocable, let my situation be what it may, for I seek to fly from vice, not from God.

I am fearful our little Niobe will be hurt by receiving a letter, with your superscription, sealed up from her perusal; but she must
not

not see what I have said of my Lord and her, for I know it would unhinge us all.

Should I be so happy as to see you, I will present father Venols as a man worthy of your, yes Nancy, *your* best approbation—I have already described you to him—shewn him your miniature, which he contemplates with deep attention; and, should his heart be free, I think no witchcraft necessary to foretel what might naturally ensue—But I will not introduce him until I have put him to his purgation; for my Nancy shall never accept the moiety of any man's affection.

Mrs. Ashley has had a legacy left her, which will enable her to enlarge her views, and live to her own choice. She will, I apprehend, soon quit the convent, and pay my dear girl a visit, which cannot but be acceptable, as she will receive those particulars from her lips which our literary intercourse could not admit of—Oh! how shall I envy her the interview!

But adieu, adieu, &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XXXIII.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

BEHOLD, Madam, the disgrace I am fallen into!—But I submit—Something, of which I am wholly unconscious, must have excluded me from the long-continued

nued confidence Miss Gerrard has honoured me with.—She may hereafter, however, spare her locks of wax; for, since I know it is her pleasure I should be shut out from the knowledge of her affairs, I will never presume to read another letter that passes through my hands—but don't tell her so; for it would hurt her, and, let me suffer what mortifications I may, I will never lodge the slightest sting in her much loved bosom.

Lord D—— found me this morning in tears, and I am a poor dissembler——He expressed some solicitude to know the cause, and the tempter of all hearts suggested to me my country for my excuse; but I spurned the thought, held fast my integrity, and only begged to be spared on that subject, adding, he would much oblige me by not mentioning my weakness to my friend.

I shall be miserable till I hear from you again, lest this fatal epistle should contain some misconception of me that may exclude me from your friendship likewise. I can appeal to the Searcher of Hearts——But I have done——To suspect me is to wound me mortally; and unless you bid me, or I have such matter to communicate as I know will give you pleasure, or that you cannot otherwise be informed of, I fear I shall not presume to write again.

Alas! alas! that friendship like ours should be dissolved without affording the innocent an opportunity of exculpating herself. I would fly to England immediately, but apprehend I have services in my power no one else could
render

render our friend, and will, Madam, bear my unmerited disgrace like a heroine.

Mr. Vénols seems much struck with Miss Gerrard's understanding, temper, and conversation—There is nothing, you will say, miraculous in that—Should I reverse the article of intelligence, I might perhaps surprize you; but I will not take upon me to see, hear, or comprehend any thing, as I used to do, for all the little sunshine of my prospects is now obscured.

I can now enter into the dangers a young mind is exposed to when weighed down by a severe disappointment on the one hand, and soothed by the voice of piety on the other; nor, was my Lord in reality a priest, could I, with all my knowledge of this convent, or persuasion that it is the likeness of all other convents on earth, answer for the consequence—he administers comfort in such sweet and gentle terms, and his features are so obedient to the humane dictates of his heart, that you would involuntarily believe him the first, the best, the tenderest of men.

Many of the sisterhood are, I perceive, too sensible of his perfections, and are so far from behaving towards him like holy vestals, that I am satisfied he despises them as much as he reverences his Louisa.

Mrs. Ashley is preparing to leave us—You will then, Madam, see one of the most worthy women in the world—She says she knows not how to bid adieu to our friends, nay to the little Niobe; for, however unhappily I may be fallen in Miss Gerrard's opinion, I have by no ac-

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tion, or word, forfeited the esteem of this nice-distinguishing lady. She is, however, a stranger to my grief, my dishonour; for so warmly would she interest herself in the cause of the injured, that she could not keep the secret, but would wound my still beloved Maria with the demand of an explanation.

I am to pass months and months with Lady D——, now our Louisa, unless some evil accident intervenes; and should you, Madam, not cast me off, I shall not despair of retrieving my reputation with Miss Gerrard: but it must be on a full conviction that I did *not* merit her coldness, for I have too much of the American in my composition to wish to live to be forgiven; for forgiveness implies the commission of a fault.

I am, my dear Madam, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XXXIV.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss SMITH.

MARIA's false delicacy, my good and amiable girl, shall not restrain me from letting you into the unreserved secret of her heart. Instead of abated friendship, she feels for you a mother's tenderness, a mother's apprehensions; and, in compassion to your youth, inexperience, and quick sensibility, would (but cannot find fit words) caution you against too lively an affection for any man.

She

She knows your noble nature, and is satisfied that you would rather die than do a dishonourable action; but, my love, to see you ever so innocently unhappy, would wound her unspeakably, and in the confidence of friendship she has just hinted to me some, believe me, natural fears, lest the agreeable Lord D—— should steal from your bosom the soft tranquility it was wont to enjoy, and, though your regard for Louisa may be undiminished, your wishes for their union as strong as ever (for such a thing is within possibility), that you should cherish an attachment to a sense of his perfections, which might not only give you pain, but prevent your doing justice to the merits of any other gentleman your own charms may incite, or the wisdom of your revered father and mother encourage to aspire to the honour of your hand.

Now, now, my sweet Niobe, *do I play the touchstone with you, to try if you be current friend or not*—Ask your heart, then, my dear, and let me receive your undisguised answer—Is there not *meaning* in our Maria's anxiety?

She dreaded your coming to the knowledge of her thoughts, lest it should cause you to wrap yourself up in reserve, whilst the evil was corroding at your heart: but I conceive so highly of your understanding and your liberality, that I foresee but one danger in this frank *éclaircissement* of what gave you so much uneasiness; and that is, your loving me better than our Maria, and fancying me by much the most judicious personage.

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I will, moreover, with the freedom of an old friend, tell you, that your conduct on this occasion will give all the colour to your future life: yet lessen not your good opinion of his Lordship, your idea of his agreeable figure or pleasing conversation; but bring them down to the fit and amiable standard of sisterly regard, and tremble at every flight of approbation, every glow of affection, that would buoy you above it. Though too young, for, if I remember right, you are not yet sixteen, to think of becoming a wife, take my word for it you have attained the full age of tender, of permanent susceptibility, from which I thus seek to secure you. Write out your whole soul to me, therefore, my beloved girl, and let us have our secrets as well as the rest of the world; and on my life, without your permission, not one syllable of our correspondence shall escape me, even to Maria.

Do not be angry with yourself, if, on the examination I recommend to you, you should discover that our friend's alarms have some little foundation— but nip the undue inclination in the bud, and assure yourself, that, when the heart is pure, the transition is easy from what is called love to a sister's affection.

I am most sincerely, &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER

LETTER XXXV.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

I Much fear, my Nancy, my apprehensions for our Niobe proceeded from the softened state of my own heart.—Is it then in a convent, and when bound down by the vestal's vow, that my affections are to be won?—I have solemnly devoted myself to perpetual celibacy, yet suffer the thought unchecked to pass over my mind, that I could pass my days, my life, with the engaging Venols—His attentions to me are of the tenderest kind, his approbation the most flattering; and, though he never tells me I am the object of his choice, his actions are far, far too intelligent not to be understood.

Neither my Lord nor he sleep under the same roof with us holy virgins, but have a sweet little romantic lodge at the extremity of the garden, from whence, free as air, by private keys, the favour of the night, and the privilege of their function, they can visit us and pass whole hours in conversing with us.

Some little restraint is, however, become necessary by the introduction of a deputy household father, who, though he walks abroad in a large wig and long beard, I shrewdly suspect to be one of the younger priests, and as arrant a Levite as any you have read of.

There are particular times, you must know, when the sisterhood, besides being attended by

their common confessor, are obliged to prostrate themselves before this domestic Jesuit, and purge their souls from all their foul stains by the *Fuller's-earth* of human absolution.

I dread our Louisa's rencounter with him ; for, should he form any base designs upon her—to escape would be only another kind of ruin—if escape she can by Lord D——'s interposition.—Heaven grant us a release, though our existence should be the price, rather than fall a prey to these Philistines !

Were we but on the coast, as Lord D—— observed in his first visit to Louisa's cell, nothing would be easier than getting off ; for we might be dropped from the windows of his or Venols' apartment, and fly immediately to a ship—Yet let me correct myself—the French ports can never be so slightly guarded as not to throw impediments in our way—There would nevertheless, certainly, be a greater chance for clearing a few mercenary tide waiters, than eluding the vigilance of those persons not only intrusted with the care of towns, and liable to have their omissions detected at the next post, but whose heads would be the demanded penalty of their failure in the performance of their duty.

Mrs. Ashley has left us this morning, and Niobe's tears again flow—Lord D—— is so good as to try to comfort her, and may he not wound the bosom he seeks to heal ! The good widow has promised to visit you the first possible moment, and tell you all she knows of us and our affairs—I am sorry she is gone for very many (I own selfish) reasons, though I rejoice

rejoice in the pleasure you will derive from her company and conversation.

Niobe will, however, be the greatest sufferer, as she has now no companion to her taste, or other confident to divide her hopes or fears with but this handsome Lord, who must be a dangerous friend to so young a heart.

I clearly perceive the dear girl is mortified by the sealed letter, for she does not look up to me with the freedom, the affection, the unreserve, she was accustomed to do; yet in no degree relaxes her diligence to serve or assist us; nor will she confess to his Lordship she is affected by any circumstance but Mrs. Ashley's departure. The excuse is plausible, but, however admitted as full and satisfactory by him, I well know, is only a *part* of what she feels.

The Lady Abbess is ill, and no one, truly, is worthy to be her confessor but Venols.—What a censorious wretch I am become!—But could you see the accomplished fellow, acquainted as we are with the nature of these *holy* visitations, I think you would not be much behind-hand with me in drawing conclusions.

This favouritism is a feather in all our caps, besides being the source of many otherwise unattainable indulgences; we have therefore no reason whatever to be dissatisfied with it.

The opiate intended to be administered to us when *out-of-door* things are in a proper train, has been tried on two or three animals, which have lain to all appearance dead for several hours, in my Lord's lodge, and, at the

expiration thereof, revived, without any visible pang or inconvenience.

The contest is whether Louisa or your friend shall first prove its efficacy—I dread some fatal operation for her I am wholly fearless of in my own person, and her feelings are exactly similar for me—We would therefore gladly sleep together; but it is not thought prudent, as the sudden death of two young women only a few hours before in perfect health might create suspicions, or at best scrutinies fatal to our wishes.

You must not, however, have alarms because we are foolish and cowardly—In this den we cannot hope to live out half our days unpolluted—My Lord and Mr. Venols, should even their resolution of following their assumed function continue, may not always have sufficient interest to remain under this roof; for, should their friend, the cardinal, be cut off, all their influence with the holy see would be at an end. Jealousies are, moreover, often created by an apparent attachment to a particular convent, and the monopoly of handsome nuns is by no means countenanced by the brotherhood. What would, then, become of us, I tremble but to think, after the sweet calm of innocence and peace we have enjoyed under their auspices.

I have a notion our Lady Abbess's illness is all a sham, nor can Venols deny he is of the same opinion.—Here is another rock on which we may split—for, if he declines an overture towards an amour, a disappointed woman may be capable of much mischief; and, if he falls in

in with her humour, disgust is too frequently born of such connections for us to flatter ourselves she will long be found his friend.—Any way, every way, her power is to be feared; for she is a great woman with the great proprietors of this dome.

Louisa's heart (though her behaviour to Lord D—— is soft and engaging) does not seem *touched* by his merits—You must not think meanly of me—but I do conceive Venols would have had the best chance with her; for Venols is insinuating, Lord D—— entertaining.; Venols—but no matter—I will only add, that

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XXXVI.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

OH! my dear Madam, what have you done!—I lay hid from myself until your heart-searching letter came to my hands—There is no need of examining into a noon-day fact, and you have recovered my unwary steps from a precipice.

As at first trial of skill on my sensibility and resolution, I forbade myself to walk as usual in the garden; and, that I might not be deceived by the belief that I only wanted to enquire after the health and happiness of our Maria and Louisa, I contrived to see the for-

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mer, and exchange a friendly how-do-ye at the very hour I knew his Lordship was taking his morning's airing—on the spot I had so frequently and so officiously met him.

Never, never did I pass so uneasy a day since my entrance into the convent—I have shed more tears, it is true, and have felt keener anguish, both on my dear father's and mother's, and Miss Gerrard's account, but not such painful self-denial, such treacherous suggestions, or such earnest desire to converse with any human being I had so little real business with as with this Lord.

I next took myself to task as to the *what* I could mean by such violent, such unexampled partiality?—My heart replied, it was because Lord D — was the most amiable of men—Well, granting as much, cried I, is he not tenderly attached to the most amiable of women, consequently cannot even be so much as wished by you to return your admiration?—when (for, Madam, I will conceal nothing from you), to my surprise and distress, this heart of mine told me, Louisa was too insensible of his merit to deserve to be united to it.

This finished me with myself; and there is no other way on earth of regaining my own good opinion, than by conquering this growing impropriety in my soul.

I farther enquired whether I was so debased by this secret alloy in my temper, as to be capable of folding myself up in selfish schemes, and could be reconciled to the idea of flying with this too agreeable Lord, and leaving my friends to shift for themselves?—But here, Madam,

I had

I had not only the happiness to receive a positive negative, but to shudder at the consciousness of having made it a question. Thus, you will perceive, though the surface is troubled, all is pure at the bottom.

I can now meet Miss Gerrard with joy, and trust, in a little week or so, his Lordship with composure — You shall, however, know all the changes and operations of my mind in return for your condescending goodness; nor can I wish, when Miss Gerrard has escaped these walls, that she should be excluded from the knowledge of my folly.

You have heard, I suppose, that the good Mrs. Ashley has left us — I would have accompanied her to England, but that my work is not at present little more than half accomplished. It is true, I am ignorant of the difficulties that attend these elopements, yet methinks my invention would have proved more fertile than these gentleman's have yet done, who really seem to me, from the happiness they now enjoy, to forget the dangers with which they are threatened — But I am impatient to receive your personal instructions for my own particular conduct, in what I palpably feel to be the most important crisis of my life.

But is it not, Madam, astonishing, that I should for so many weeks think of this man with delight, and talk of him with rapture, without once suspecting the cause, till your letter, like a faithful mirror, shewed me the true complexion of my heart, and roused me to combat what I have hitherto cherished? — Am I now a discredit to my country?

My

My Lord begs to speak to me——You will too plainly perceive by the blot I have made, with what *sisterly* sensations I obey his uncommon request: however, it brings this consolation along with it—that the bold officious girl has not, as usual, *thrown* herself in his way; but for the sake of Louisa, Maria——well well—she cannot on this occasion avoid seeing him.—Oh! dear Madam, I wish I had never been driven from America!

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I have Miss Gerrard to thank, Madam, for this interview—How little does she know the danger of her friend!—But I forget it was her fears that gave you the alarm, and it is your caution that shall prove a shield of defence to my poor heart.

“Where is father Stephen?” said I (the name this nobleman is known by in this house); “where is he?” repeated I, with an agitation I vainly strove to suppress. “In the garden, replied the messenger, where he will remain till you attend him.”

• Away I went, my heart flying out to meet him, but my feet, obedient to the dictates of reason, moving me very slowly forward. He arose as soon as he saw me, and gave me the usual benediction; then told me that Miss Gerrard requested I would inform you she had hopes of carrying her designs into execution this very next week, and would write to you from Dover, if ever she reached that spot, to relieve you from your friendly suspense.

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But, Madam, I like not the experiment, desperation puts this friend of ours upon trying—She is this very afternoon to complain of indisposition, and at the appointed time, by means of an opiate to be laid asleep—the sleep perhaps of death—in order to be conveyed to the dormitory, where Mr. Venols is to be concealed for the purpose of watching her returning sense, and contriving some means of secreting her until they can all depart in peace.

I expressed my terrors, and in the strongest terms conjured Lord D—— not to be accessory to such a scheme. “Something fatal will surely attend it, said I, when we shall not only have the loss of my amiable friend to deplore, but the additional misery of knowing we were consenting to her dissolution.”

He smiled at my fears, but complimented me upon their motive, exhorting me to be of good courage.—And now, Madam, I will tell you what discovery I have made from this meeting.

Love is the subtle, the cruel invader of idle hearts—Miss Gerrard in security, I had my palpitations at this Lord’s approach, my pangs at his departure: but the greater malady has subdued the lesser—I regard him, at this juncture only in the light of a man who, with the best intentions possible, is on the point of committing a fatal action.

“I must see her once more, cried I, as he left me, must bid her adieu—Can it not be contrived for me to watch over her? A dormitory has no terrors for me, unless it deprives
me

me of my friends.—You know, Sir, I may be confided in—recollect, I am an American, and have been bred up to despise bugbears—no one can assist her in an hour of need so effectually as myself—Only grant me this poor petition, and I will accede to all the rest.” He assured me he would think of it, and let me know what he could do for me in the evening. I am distressed, distracted!—Why did not Louisa lead the way?—Thus am I once more bound down to the rack of suspense.—Heaven avert the evil I apprehend, and restore us all to peace, to friendship, and to you!

I am, Madam, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

P. S. It seems, Madam, they drew lots on this occasion, and, most unfortunately for us, our dear friend will be the victim.

L E T T E R XXXVII.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss GERRARD.

MRS. Ashley has just left me. On my word, my dear Maria, neither your pen, nor the pen of your little friend, has done her justice.—Agreeable, quotha! She is a lovely woman, and the most sensible and entertaining companion I ever met with.

My father came in while we were at tea, and betrayed some tokens of surprise and admiration I never observed him shew before on any occasion.

occasion. I, however, conceived the giddy idea that floated across my brain ought not to be communicated on so *young* an acquaintance, and I resolved to leave events to their own workings; for I confess to you I should be delighted with such a mother-in-law. My father, Maria, though not a polished, is in no degree an ineligible man; he has good sense, a good heart, and a good fortune, to recommend him to favour. — Indeed, I grant you, he is somewhat turned of fifty, but what of that? Mrs. Ashley, if she is capable of entering a second time into the holy state of matrimony, would, I am confident, rather chuse a man of his years than a boy: nor shall any thing in my power be wanting to promote the match; for, my dear girl, if to promote the happiness of a child can entitle a father to consideration, mine has a right to all my kindness — I will now tell you what he has done for me.

Though he had found out a husband for me, and, on the presumption of my approving his choice, pledged his honour to the young fellow's father to bestow me on no other; though he thought highly of the intended bridegroom, and had made up his affairs so as to determine my fortune and his own provision, yet no sooner did I open my heart to him, and assure him that for the present a single life was most pleasing to me, particularly as I was not so fortunate as to see the gentleman with his eyes, than he cried, "God forbid I should make my girl miserable by any busy step of mine! You are and shall be mistress of your own person; only remember, whenever you do change your
sentiments,

sentiments, that you have a father, and I think I can promise you, you shall have no reason to repent confiding in him."

There, my Maria, there is a father for you! Not my whole days passed in filial attentions can make amends for such indulgence; and when I abuse it, may Heaven in its wrath make the object, for which I gave up such a parent, the instrument of punishing my black ingratitude and heinous disobedience.

As for your mother, we must, my beloved girl, draw a good-natured veil over her errors for ever; for, I am sorry to tell you, she severely smarts for her neglect of her amiable daughter, and disrespect to your father's memory.

The man she married was a specious, plausible gambler; his figure, his dress, his conversation, all calculated to undo the female world. Your mother believed him an angel, and, with a degree of heroism natural at fifteen, but preposterous towards forty, threw her fortune as well as happiness on his mercy.

His treatment of her was kind, but his absence from home frequent and alarming: two, three, five in the morning were his common hours of return; yet still he returned unquestioned, until the fatal night that the horror of his countenance told her some singular misfortune had befallen him.

"You will hear it, feel it too soon, said he—I have undone you, my children, and myself nor have I a resource on earth, except——"

Terrified no less by his aspect than his words, your mother sunk into a chair, and
fainted

fainted away, at which moment snatching up a pistol that most unfortunately lay by the bedside, he shot himself dead at her feet.

The report brought her servants about her, who trembled at the scene—their master dead! their mistress, in successive fainting fits!—They knew not how to act; but at length one of them became so collected as to call in the assistance of a neighbouring apothecary, who bid them move the Lady into another apartment, and had the wisdom to bleed her immediately.

He sat by her till it was day-light, and then advised the servants to send for such of her friends as they conceived would be most useful to her under her melancholy circumstances; but before any step could be taken, a loud rapping at the door called off their attention from the present to a new distress—an execution was brought into the house, and every soul of the family told they must instantly quit the premises.

Your mother arose, and with astonishing composure ordered herself to be conveyed to a lodging-house a few streets off, which was kept by a woman that had been formerly her servant, and whom she doubted not would give her a kind reception: but, alas! the news of her ruin had out-gone her speed, and when she arrived, a little dirty girl told her, with cruel pertness, that her mistress was not at home, nor did she know when to expect her, and she had orders to admit no person whatever in her absence.

“Do you not know me?” said the unhappy one.—“O yes, Madam, very well; you are the
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the lady whose husband has gambled away his fortune."—"Take me, said your mother, with undescribable agony of mind, take me to Miss Freeman's."

The chairmen stared on each other—"Where did Miss Freeman live?" She gave them my father's direction, and was soon set down at our door.

I felt myself at first offended by the liberty she had taken with me; but it instantly occurred to me that some change of fortune might have induced her to call upon me: and so I ordered she should be shewn into the parlour, and hurried down to do her all the good in my power.

Judge, if you can, what I felt on learning the dreadful catastrophe she had been witness of, and the barbarity of the wretch who owed her all to your family.—I immediately sent out and got her a neat comfortable lodging, and putting my purse, in which was only four poor guineas and a half, into her hands, promised I would consider how I could be serviceable to her, and would see her the next day.

Tears now relieved her oppressed heart, and I encouraged them to flow—She mentioned you with tenderness—talked something that a judgment had overtaken her on your account; then clapping her hands together, from sudden recollection, exclaimed, "My children! where are my children?"

The parlour door happened luckily to be open; and the chairman, hearing this distressful demand, said, they saw a little boy and girl in some woman's arms at the house where she

was

was taken up. This, in some degree pacified her, and I ordered them to convey the lady safe, my Hannah walking by the side of the chair, in case of a return of her fits, and then go for the children.

I was so affected by what I had seen and heard, that I wept as if I had been beat, and, by way of composing my spirits, sent for a hackney-coach and went to good Mrs. Ashley's.

What powers this woman has to soothe, to calm the ruffled mind!—Her humanity moreover, prevented my wishes, and she offered to do the unfortunate Mrs. Deering all the service she could. We accordingly held a consultation, in the conclusion of which it was settled, that, as you would no longer, we hoped, want your annuity, it should be transferred to her for the support of herself and infants, one of which is but six weeks old.

I have been with her this morning, and found Mrs. Ashley there before me: but no wonder, for in the course of conversation, I discovered she had sat up with her all night, softened her affliction, and, in all probability, saved her from distraction or despair.

I then proposed that the last-born child should be put out to nurse, which was generally agreed to; and that the little girl, now just turned of a year and a half old, should remain with its mother, as her pretty prattle and pretty actions might possibly amuse her.

Mr. Deering's relations, having found out your mother's retreat, sent very decently to enquire after her health, but informed her, that, except taking upon them the expences
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of the last mournful office their deluded kinsman stood in need of, they had only good wishes to offer her. This was no more than she was prepared for; but the next hour she received a most unexpected visitor—an old Lady that was great aunt to the deceased, who put a ten-pound bank-note into her hands, and begged to be intrusted with the provision and education of the little girl; which was most readily complied with, for I perceived your mother's health was likely to suffer from the severe shock she had sustained, and that therefore the most engaging child must be in the way.

Now, Maria, I must caution you not to take this matter by the wrong handle—Your mother's heart was such, that a less striking lesson would never have reached it; and I have told you all the melancholy particulars of her distress, in order to teach you to rejoice that you have the power of returning good for evil, and sheltering a parent's head from want; that—but she remembers *now* she is a mother, and, should she become the woman she promises, must not be denied the pleasure of embracing you. I have run this letter already to a great length, but will not conclude, much less dispatch it, until I can with certainty tell you that Mrs. Deering is in a fair way of being comfortably disposed of.

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Every thing is settled to my wish, and my father, Maria, has unspeakably endeared himself

self to my heart by his conduct on this melancholy occasion: in a word, it being your mother's desire to retire into the country, we have contrived to surprise her with a sweet little cottage, in an agreeable neighbourhood, fitted up, and furnished, fit for a gentlewoman's occupation — and all this, Maria, without breaking in upon your annuity, which Mr. Freeman declares shall be preserved to you, his old acquaintance's child, as the wrecks of the worthy Mr. Gerrard's fortune. How do I love his honest heart for its honesty, its manly distinctions!

But, observe, this is to be a profound secret for ever to Mrs. Deering, who is to be left to suppose the little annuity she receives out of my pin-money (for so my father calls the pocket-money he allows me) is paid her by your direction; the presents sent her in, the occasional remembrances of her husband's relations — and may Mrs. Ashley be the reward of all my father's indulgences shewn to his happy daughter!

It is, moreover, granted me, that the Little Niobe shall be my constant companion, whenever she returns, or rather comes, to England. My father's circumstances, my dear, though always good, are much improved within these two last years; and he seems to have a right sense of the uses of prosperity, namely, to make himself and friends happy. — Mrs. Ashley has given us such a description of the little American, that he is quite charmed with the idea of adding her to his family.

But, Maria, there is an alloy to every satisfaction;

tisfaction; for our national disputes seem to rise higher and higher, and forbid every hope to Miss Smith's dear relations of being restored to their lost possessions.

I am in hourly expectation of hearing from some one of you, and really think your letters, properly arranged, will be an agreeable present to the public, if your adventures have a happy conclusion; otherwise I shall keep them to weep over, and augment my regrets of the felicity which once was mine.

I am, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER XXXVIII.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

I HAVE suffered more distress of mind than I have words to express from the apprehension of losing Miss Gerrard—and after every task I took my heart to, every argument my reason furnished me with of the cruel necessity she was under of hazarding much, to gain, if possible, her liberty, I found myself so unequal to sustain the shock of beholding her to all appearance lifeless, and the dreadful interval that must succeed before her revival, that I resolved to take to my bed, and there, under colour of bodily disorder, nurse the horrors, the unsoundness, of my mind.

The alarming preparations were carried on.—My Lord D—, with great humanity, laboured

laboured hard to persuade me all would terminate to our satisfaction; and I was actually indulged with a parting interview, in which I behaved so heroically as—to fall into a swoon, and was conveyed to my chamber before I was sensible of a single transaction.

The night I passed was a night of wretchedness—I counted every hour—“Now, now perhaps, I cried, she has bid adieu to this wicked place, to hope, to her Niobe.” At length the morning came, when who should present himself at my bed-side, but Lord D.—, under pretence of giving me ghostly counsel, and prevailing on me to ask the prayers of the holy community. The scholar that sat as a kind attendant in my apartment, retired with all reverence to its extremity, when my Lord, kneeling down, and opening a pious composition, in a low voice, and with all the graces of devout supplication, told me that what I so much feared had not come to pass, for that the bottle which contained the precious liquid was burst and the contents spilt.

“Thank God! cried I, emphatically; thank God for this happy deliverance!—Your words, Sir, are balm to my soul, and I shall soon be well.”

Luckily, but not from any wisdom of mine, (for I was transported quite off my guard,) my expressions conveyed a meaning to the girl the most foreign of all others to their true one, and induced her, in the fulness of her zeal and joy, (for she is a rigid Catholic,) to slip out and proclaim the glad-tidings that Father Stephen had absolutely converted me,
and,

and, she believed, was proceeding to confess me.

His Lordship was the first to perceive we were alone—and then added, that, as Mr. Venols found his situation, from the Lady Abbess's behaviour, a very uneasy one, it was agreed he should once more go to Rome, for the double purpose of avoiding a rupture with that finished hypocrite, and to purchase another phial of the compound accident had deprived them of, and which, without suspicion, could not be obtained on any other spot.—Having said thus much, and intreated me to shew myself abroad for Miss Gerrard's satisfaction, who was, beyond measure, anxious to know how I did, he very politely retired, and the young girl resumed her good-natured office of watching by me.

Heaven has thus been graciously pleased, my dear Madam, to interfere, and save our beloved Maria from destruction, which my heart will receive as an earnest of future preservation.

Grief and apprehension had hitherto kept me waking, and now joy had its equally violent effect on my frame; and chased far from me every capacity of composing myself: but, as dissimulation is the mode in this house, and who can best practise its arts, is best secured from being practised upon, I had the resolution to lie still for near two hours, when declaring myself better, I also declared my desire to rise and walk in the garden for a little air. Away tripped the girl for orders, and quickly

quickly returned with full and free permission for me to do as I pleased.

It seems, my indisposition was imputed to a holy conflict with which Heaven had been pleased to visit me ; and my returning health, to the consolation I had derived from the good Father Stephen's attendance.—But mark, my dear Madam, what privileges these Levites have in bed or up—neither the *how* nor the *where* is deemed an impropriety in receiving these *pious* visits—and, as confession is a solemn and a private act, you are left alone in like manner as I have described ; nor will the retiring party re-enter the room until the priest is departed.

My first care was to try to get a sight of our Maria ; nor was I long unsuccessful—But our eyes alone spoke our feelings, for we were too closely observed to be able to exchange one syllable.

Now I am re-instated in my own good opinion, by being re-established in Miss Gerard's confidence, I will re-indulge my saucy vein, and tell you, that, if I have any skill in reading hearts, Mr. Venols's absence will sit but uneasily on a lady that shall be *nameless*.—It is the only separation they will have known since their acquaintance—I mean for longer continuance than a day or so—and, I dare prophesy, will be productive of weeping and wailing secretly, if not publicly, to both parties.

I have now, my good Madam, a request to make to you, which I doubt not but you will readily oblige me in—One of our boarders has

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had

had a lottery ticket sent her by her mother, and this poor head of mine runs much upon throwing myself in fortune's way, by the hazard of one twelve pounds, which my savings enable me to spare, and for which I enclose you a draught on the gentleman in London, who remits me my little stipend, instead of having it sent here to defray the expences I have already settled and satisfied.

Do you yourself chuse it, and breathe a benevolent prayer over it : for oh ! should I prove a fortunate adventurer, my dear father and mother shall find how much I prefer their accommodation and happiness to my own ; or, rather, that what I have the power of doing for them, is twice done for their poor little girl.

Do not, however, send me the ticket, but the number—that, by retaining it in your hands, if any benefit accrues, you may the sooner receive and transmit it to my distressed family. Need I add, that a line of information, whenever its fate is ascertained, will be highly acceptable to

Your most obliged

And affectionate

A. SMITH ?

L E T T E R XXXIX.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

OUR Abelard has left us—left us all, my dear Nancy, in deep disconsolation ; for we had flattered ourselves, that long before

fore this period we should have struck a happy stroke, and been on the wing in our way to England.

Niobe, however, as I doubt not but she has told you, rejoices in our disappointment; nor, till the event overturns her opinion, will believe that death would not have ensued, if I had swallowed the potion.

Never will I be won by a heavenly countenance again; where the heart is unknown.— This bad woman, this dishonour to the sex, and reproach to religion, our Lady Abbess, who has tried every art to allure Mr. Venols into an intrigue with her,—on finding him resolved to visit Rome, instead of closing with her wishes, conceives his journey, though he assures her he has letters of recal, only a device to escape her toils; and is become a fury in displeasure and resentment.

He waited upon her, with a show of complaisance, to take his leave; but she would not hear a word he had to offer in justification of his conduct—haughtily bidding him go, and never see her more.

This was, to banish him the convent; but he seems to be pretty clear that *penitence* will restore him to favour, and obtain his re-admission on his return from Rome.

There are moments, my Nancy, when the mind is particularly softened, and, we are surprised into acknowledgements very foreign to our intentions—such a moment as this I had like to have experienced on Venols's bidding me adieu—The tenderness, the friendship, he professed for me, and the journey he was pre-

paring to take for my sake, all, all conspired to draw the confession from me, that I was not insensible of his merit; but the recollection of my vow, and the mean figure I must make in the eyes of a man whose esteem was dear to me, raised me above this female weakness, and enabled me to wish him well and happy with a very tolerable grace, though, I cannot deny it to you, a severely-aching heart.

I, indeed, feel the loss of his agreeable company most heavily, though, I trust, our parting will only be a temporary one for many reasons I need not particularize to you, who are well acquainted with my situation, and the small circle of my amusements, from the description I have given you.

I hope for a letter from you this very day; and, as I am not in the writing vein, will postpone what I have further to say to you on my views, &c. till I receive it.

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What a mixture of comfort and affliction, distress and joy, your last kind letter contains!

My mother, poor thing! how bitterly has she suffered, and how infinitely your friendly care of her touches me!—But you are all goodness and generosity, and Mrs. Ashley is your kindred mind; no wonder, then, that you should love yourself in her.

Could we once get clear of this dismal prison, I should not despair of being serviceable to my mother. Louisa's aunt has a fine fortune, and there was nothing against her
with

with that lady but her religion. When, therefore, she throws herself at her feet, confesses her errors, and renounces them, she persuades herself she shall not only find a blessed asylum for herself under her wing, but be able to introduce me to a participation of her prosperity.

Louisa, though there is little merit in my conduct towards her, has certainly some reason to love me; and, measuring her heart by my own, (for was I, Nancy, mistress of millions, we would have but one purse,) I think I shall not hesitate to share her good, since I have so firmly, on repeated occasions, shared her bad fortune. Obligations, when incurred by weak, or conferred by little minds, are the bane of friendship, and the source of insult: but Louisa is the noblest creature breathing; and her happiness appears so bound up in mine, that I verily believe she could not taste the affluence from which I was excluded. My poor mother is, therefore, most heartily welcome to resume and enjoy what she authorised me to call mine! Her change of condition and sentiments demand my utmost commiseration and attention; nor shall she find me wanting, but when the power of assisting her is denied.

But what must become of the Little Niobe, as the troubles of her country unhappily continue, nay, increase? Yet let me not do Mrs. Ashley so much injustice, as to suppose, that, whilst she has a home, her little favourite will know the least inconvenience. And thus, my Nancy, would Heaven be pleased to smile

on our endeavours, we should be all amply and happily provided for.

What an example to young women is our sweet Miss Smith, of all that is great and amiable—From the moment she received your sensible hints for her behaviour towards Lord D—— she has most religiously followed them; and, though I am convinced he is the man she loves, has her expressions and countenance under such prudent regulation, that none besides us, her assured friends, can suspect such a thing. My conjectures were too just with regard to the age and disposition of our household deputy; nor is his holy function any thing more than a cloak for his licentiousness.

I was ordered to attend him in the confessional, which I entered veiled, and had generally been permitted to quit it without exposing my features; but, under the idle pretence of reading the heart in the face, he insisted on my throwing off the cloud, as he called it, and I could perceive he was not much struck with my charms.

He asked me how long I had been a holy sister, what were my inducements to become such, and whether I was still satisfied with my election?

I knelt, as is the custom, and made the proper responses; for to have denied that I repented, would have given him no opportunity of displaying the rigor or lenity of his soul in the imposed propitiations.

When I had concluded, he groaned devoutly three several times, and then lamented in suitable terms the instability of the human heart,

heart, and the perverseness of the human will. "In the world, said he, you would have sighed for the life of a recluse, in a convent you sigh for the world — but it is a sin rather of your nature than your inclination, and I leave it to yourself to punish it. You well know, I presume, continued he, that to feed a disease, is an offence against reason; to feed a favourite vice, an offence against religion — force, then, your senses to do their part towards your cure; shut up your ears, your eyes, your mind, to every object that is calculated to increase your fondness for life, and supply the vacancy with *Pater-Nosters*. Your common confessor will instruct you in the rest — resume your veil, and retire — It was Louisa's turn next, who, by my advice, had taken pains to dress herself in the least becoming manner in her power; but her native loveliness predominated, and I trembled for the consequence. To guard, however, as much as possible against disagreeable accidents, I attended her to the door, and waited on the outside for her coming forth.

So soon, she says, as her veil was withdrawn, "Why aye, exclaimed the holy father, these are the faces that furnish so much business for our order! But come, disguise nothing from me — how many hearts have you seduced, what mischiefs have you occasioned? Tell me all, from first to last; for no one, I am persuaded, can behold you without feeling his danger, and, if he is wise, flying to his prayers for protection."

Louisa modestly and solemnly assured him,

she had no sins of the kind he mentioned to charge herself with ; that her days had been spent in frailty, not criminality ; that it was her care, her desire, much rather to escape than catch mens eyes ; and that, as a proof of it, she should be happy to put her veil on, and shade her from his view, for she never put it off but with reluctance. This he violently protested against ; and further demanded to know if she had yet seen the object that could make her execrate her vow ? She replied, she had not ; for, if she had only insinuated the contrary, her heart would have been ript, but he would have come at the secret.

He then severely reprimanded her for omitting her attendance at many ceremonies ; and, in order that he might be certain that she did not fail in future, commanded she should set a mark on her veil, but on no occasion or account walk about the convent uncovered whilst her youth remained.

He called her one of the self-righteous, the self-justified ; and insinuated, in like manner with my holy admirer, that, as there was declared more joy in heaven over the first of sinners that repented, so there was more hope of them on earth than of your unnatural characters—your cold, *just* persons that need no repentance ; but that he would consider her case, and see her again in a few days.—*A-propos* of my holy admirer—thank heaven he is gone to England, and possibly, as I will not again be nice in the choice of my words, I may never more be annoyed on the subject of gallantry, either within or without these walls : but for
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the beautiful Louisa, I am satisfied, she will experience a fiery persecution from this high-fed Levite, unless some actual miracle delivers her out of his hands. — My Lord, however, must not know a syllable of the matter; for he has too much youth, too much courage, and too much love, to be trusted with a secret of that complexion, and would, by his impatience under so trying a circumstance, ruin all our fair and glorious schemes.

Mr. Venols has written to me, and writes as agreeably as he speaks. He promises no expedition, no labour, shall be wanting on his part to forward our great designs; for that there is no life for him but in the conversation-scenes he has enjoyed in our convent, and hope to enjoy more frequently and uninterruptedly in England. — Amen I say to that! — But in England our conversations would receive new spirit, new value, and new satisfaction, by the addition of my Nancy's and Mrs. Athley's company; and that the blissful hour may not be far distant, prays

Your, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XL.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

OUR Lady Abbess, as I have already mentioned, from her late disappointment, is become peevish and suspicious, and has,

has, I am certain, given it in commission to the deputy householder, to sift and turn all our minds inside-out, until he discovers the object of Venols's attachment; for, it seems, his coldness towards her is imputed to his warmth towards some body else—and woe be to her on whose head the sin is proved of being her happy rival!

I often reflect with astonishment, so beset and catechised as our Niobe has been, that nothing has ever escaped her, to put them upon watching and prying into our conduct; but the truth is, that, under a flow of vivacity, is concealed a firm, cautious and nicely-distinguishing mind—and she shall, she must be rewarded.

Our little friend tells me she has embarked a small sum on the precarious ocean of a lottery—Various are the methods by which Providence blesses, as well as preserves, his creatures. But I fear, much more than I hope, for her on that ground; for fortune is all she wants to make her the first of her sex, and we are assured perfection shall not be found on earth.

Louisa has had a second interview with the amorous priest, when he dared to salute her with a *holy* kiss, which it seems he stole by surprise; otherwise, she conceives, she should have mortally offended him by her resistance and resentment. What, then, has she not to dread from every repeated rencounter? But with all her dangers her mortifications, her present state is much happier than mine.—Venols, the companion of those hours when
my

my Lord, Louisa, and every one else was absent, is now far distant, and Niobe only at particular periods can be conversed with. I have recourse, Nancy, in these dead intervals to your letters—bow the knee in thankfulness that I have hitherto escaped unmolested, and rejoice in the joy Mrs Ashley and you can freely taste.

My mother's poor, innocent, helpless little girl, I already feel a tenderness for.—No convent, Nancy, shall ensnare her; for I will be her sister, friend, protector.—Is she handsome? I think you say her unhappy father was. Or does she resemble me?—But plain or beautiful is little to the purpose, if she is not taught to guard against the insidious, check the bold, and despise the unprincipled.

Is it a woman of understanding that has undertaken to perform the part of a mother by her, or will she be exposed as she advances in life to the caprices of the weak, and the brow-beatings of the haughty?—I am sensible I enter too minutely into these matters; but I am tremblingly alive to incidents which Mrs. Ashley's equal-mindedness calls the natural and inevitable incidents of existence. As a poor bird that has almost fluttered itself to death, in order to find a passage through its cage, sinks down dejected and dispirited, and is hurt by the approach of every person, though, perhaps, the very person from whose hand it derives its sustenance; so I shudder at evil, shrink from good, lest it should prove evil in disguise, and have not strength of
mind

mind sufficient to enable me to endure, examine, or abide, the common lot of humanity.

I admire Lord D. in the character of a lover—he has a delicacy in his way of thinking that cannot fail to win a sensible woman's heart, and a refinement in his language that must preserve it. What proofs, moreover does he not give of his affection—title, fortune, pleasure, liberty, all either given up or waved by him for the sole delight of seeing, and the hope of serving, his beloved ?

Under this roof to precipitate their union, would be an indirect violation of all decency of manners and morality of conduct : he, therefore, conforms himself to the necessities, the proprieties, of his and her situation, and never seems to presume beyond the honour of her friendship and friendly reception of him.

This, my Nancy, is love—your priests have other views ; the present gratification is the ultimatum with them : and whether the object of their pretended admiration is happy or miserable, is in no degree their concern, provided she receives them as they wish, and, for the short period of their visitation hides her anguish in her own bosom.—Heavens ! when will the iniquity of this race be at its height ? when will the divine vengeance crush them down to the earth, never to rise again ?

It is, it seems, a frequent practice with these dark ministers, to turn and wind the holy daughters about till they draw them to betray their disapprobation or neglect of some *ceremonials*, or other unimportant points of the
Catholic

Catholic religion, when the severest penances are the consequence.

One pretty creature, who confesses herself in chains, the chains of licentiousness, assures me, her father confessor enjoined a breach of her vow as an act of penance for some trifling omission in formalities, sternly telling her, that the true meaning and intention of humiliation and mortification was to abstain from what was pleasing, and perform what was most repugnant to the inclinations. It was a sin of the deepest die, he said, to imagine that the practice of this, or the abstinence from that, either sanctified or polluted the soul. But no wonder, that, where the voice of the priest is constituted a law, the absurdest and wickedest tenets should be propagated for Gospel truths.

Venols pretends to discover that Louisa has, by no means, the affection for Lord D. so generous a lover might hope for—but she is not, like our Niobe, prompt to speak her sentiments. Few, indeed, bear their hearts about in their hands, however honest or valuable they may be in reality : nor ought we to think worse of the conduct that is constitutional in the one respect, than in the other ; for reserve may be as innocent as frankness is amiable : and I think Louisa is little capable of disappointing the expectations of a man who lives but to oblige her.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

L E T T E R XLI.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss SMITH.

BLESSED be the hour, my fortunate little girl, that you became an adventurer in our British Lottery! for independence, nay affluence, is now your own.

We did not choose to register our ticket, because we would not be insulted with the printed letters, sent about to tell the tale of disappointment, which, though called an *honor* by the office-keepers, can never be a grateful piece of information to the purchaser; and, to confess the truth to you, with all the warmest wishes in our hearts for your success, in the multitude of my vocations, your chance was wholly forgot by Mrs. Ashley and myself, until the news came flying all abroad that one of the twenty-thousand pounds was come up.

“If this should be our Niobe’s number!” said I, smiling, rather by way of cheerful chat than any idea I had of its being the case — “What joy would it bring to half a dozen bosoms! Her father and mother might then come to England and live amongst us, and their daughter be the delight, the admiration, of all that know her.”

By such kind of expressions I at length wound myself up to the dread of a surprise, which however agreeable, would be too much for my spirits — “I have not the courage to
look,

look, continued I ; therefore, my dear Mrs. Ashley, run your eye over the paper, and, in pity to the weakness of my nerves, don't inform me too abruptly, if."—

By this time she had fallen on the article of intelligence, when, blushing and hesitating, I was assured something very uncommon was the matter, and rising hastily in order to peep over her shoulder—"Be seated, my dear, she cried, it is, it is our Niobe's!"—We therefore most sincerely congratulate you on this unexpected, this un hoped-for piece of good fortune ; and may you live many, very many years, to enjoy it !

We shall not take any other step in the affair than lodging the prize in the Bank, until we hear from you.—Shall I my dear, or will you yourself, write to Mr. and Mrs Smith. The news cannot but be highly agreeable to to them, that you have been blessed with so ample a provision, at a time when the calamities of war have deprived them of their usual resources for your convenience. I know my Maria will participate the pleasure we feel on this happy occasion ; and tell her, she need not disturb her mind in a single particular respecting her mother, for that she is already quite composed, resigned, grateful, and comfortable.

Our amiable Mrs. Ashley has, my good girl, much disappointed and mortified me, by being uniform in her notions of propriety. My father was so deeply smitten with her, that he got me to be his advocate, and offer her

in his name a coach and a handsome jointure, if she would consent to be his.

But, tho' she could not accept his hand without violence to herself she refused him in a manner that has fixed him her friend for ever, nay, determined him to take leave of every idea of changing his condition.

I presumed, I am afraid rather more than I ought to have done, upon her condescension and natural sweetness of disposition. "My dear Madam, said she, if thus urging me to a step my mind cannot approve was not paying me a very high compliment, I don't know but I should be hurt by your supposing me, though in a single instance, capable of a departure from character.

"The husband I have buried, was the first and only man I ever considered in the light of a lover. I did not go to the altar with him as with a person that could be replaced on a fatal exigence in my affections, but as one whose memory would be as dear to me as his life, and resolving to be as far from dishonouring the former by my conduct, as from rendering the latter unhappy by any fault of mine. On these terms we met, and on these terms we parted—my heart is still with him in the grave, though I cease to disturb my friends, or offend the Deity, by unavailing lamentations. But believe me, my dear Miss Freeman, there is not any distress, any punishment, I would not joyfully incur, rather than unite myself to any future husband; and I must intreat you will explain my sentiments in such a manner to your good father, that I may preserve his
esteem,

esteem, though he should carry his *devoirs* to some other object."

My father was much moved by the account I gave him of her unalterable attachment to the Captain's memory.—"Her way of thinking, said he, is singular, but it is amiable; and, notwithstanding I will never more wound her ear or heart with the offer of my love, I will privately cherish it so long as I live—such a woman, Nancy, deserves that distinction—But may I really flatter myself that this, and this only, is the reason of my being refused?"

Having satisfied him in this point, he appeared much pleased.—She does not, I imagine, suppose the grave has any knowledge of her actions; but is it not a sweet monument, daughter, of her tenderness for the deceased, to withhold herself from a renewal of the matrimonial engagement, and remain a true and faithful widow, as she did a wife, to the end of her existence?"

Mrs. Ashley's behaviour is enough, my Niobe, to take away the reproach of the sex, and put all the masculine sarcasms circulated at our expence out of countenance.—But her frame will perish, whilst that of the Ephesian matron lives to latest ages—so much more active are envy, malice, and uncharitableness, than justice or liberality, in perpetuating events, and handing down characters to generations yet unborn.—I hate your men of genius for their narrow-mindedness, as much as I condemn them for their paltry witticisms, built on the disgrace of an hapless and defenceless part of the creation—the mothers, sisters, wives,

wives, and daughters of the community.— This is the reflection that would drive me to wish to take refuge in a convent, if I did not perfectly know what refuge convents afford those that rashly fly from society.

I am inconceivably happy to find by Miss Gerrard, that you have conquered the painful pleasure your innocent heart was beginning to take in Lord D——'s company and conversation ; for what, my love, but torture and self-condemnation could have been the consequence? The having acted right is such a support, such a rest for the mind, as makes ample amends for the little conflict it may have cost us. Besides, the very vanity of a sensible young woman ought not to suffer her to be content with less than the good opinion of a beloved object, which good opinion rises in its value, in proportion to the merit of him that bestows it ; and that we have the power of commanding the treatment we please, is most undeniable, whether permanent or transient.

Oh ! what a little million of pretty things shall I say to you, and how many hidden perfections, hidden from your own knowledge and the observation of your friends, shall I draw out to view, when I have the happiness to embrace you ! You are, in truth, what every good girl ought to be, tender, faithful, generous: but don't spoil all now, by suspecting you have added one grain to your worth, any more than you have added one cubit to your stature, by the blessed turn in your affairs ; for though I shall love you for bearing

bearing your prosperity meekly, I should have revered you for the graces you gave adversity, and the honour you did the human heart, by being humble with dignity, and resigned without ostentation.

I am, my sweet correspondent,

Your, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER XLII.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

O My dear Madam, you have quite over-set my little brain, by the news of my good fortune ! Adversity I had learned, from long experience, to bear tolerably well ; but prosperity shews me what a light mind I possess, and lessens me much in my own opinion, I can assure you.

Yet you must not receive a wrong impression of me—not a diadem could have transported me so out of myself, if its lustre and emoluments were confined to myself, alone ; but methinks I behold the countenances of my dear, dear father and mother, lighted up with smiles and gladness, on feeling themselves at the end of their sorrows, their poverty, their persecutions, and that their delicate natures are secured from every pang.

I have written to them, as you will find enclosed ; and beg you will dispatch my letter of information

information the first possible minute—not must you refuse to join with me in the pious, the necessary fraud of calling the ticket theirs, and affirming it was purchased for their exclusive benefits.

With what unspeakable pleasure shall I derive my provision from their bounty! and will trust to my own good behaviour for the fortune they can conveniently spare me while living, or are willing to bestow upon me, if, & in the course of things is a probable contingency, it should be my fate to survive them. Communicate, also, I conjure you, this request to my beloved Mrs. Ashley; and then with the rest of the world it will be sufficient to say, the first report was a mistake, for that the ticket, though bought out of my little pocket-money, was bought not for me, but for my father and mother: and this point settled, you will be pleased to read what I have written to these best and tenderest of relations:

My ever-dear and ever-honoured parents,

YOUR poor little girl, late a fugitive, and with only sighs and prayers to offer up for your accommodation, is now, by the immediate interposition of Providence, raised to such an eminence, as to be the minister of glad-tidings to your worthy hearts—Wipe, then, your tears for ever from your eyes, and lift them up in grateful acknowledgements to the Author of all good—to him be the praise that your cruel dependence is done away!

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I do not check this incoherence of language, because it will prepare you for the change of circumstances that await you.— Oh! did you think so poorly of your child's filial sensibility as to suppose she could enjoy the stipend your indulgence stripped yourselves of, strained your credit with your friends to allow her?—No, beyond the necessities of existence she could not gratify herself, whilst you were wanderers and pilgrims, and deriving your little from a source that wounded your feelings; for obligations cannot sit easy on liberal minds. But to the point. My little savings enabled me, a few weeks ago, to try your chance in the present state-lottery, by means of a lady in London, whom I got to purchase a ticket for your use, the success of which requires I should congratulate you on being twenty-thousand times richer than you were within these three days.

The prize-money is received, and lodged in the English Bank, or funds, till you think proper to come and take possession of it. But, in order to make your departure from Ireland the foretaste of your happiness, you herewith receive a draught for one hundred pounds; and whatever return you may conceive your relations in that kingdom intitled to for their kind reception of you, and pecuniary assistance, you can transmit them by safe and easy conveyance immediately on your being set down in London, where you will be waited upon by a couple of amiable ladies, who will make such a report of your now delighted little girl, as cannot fail to give you satisfaction;

tion ; and, be assured, you shall find her as near their partial description as is in the power of, my dear father and mother,

Your most affectionate and
dutiful child,

A. SMITH.

You will see, Madam, I have purposely avoided mentioning my coming to England, because, though I am beyond measure impatient and anxious to meet those dear relations, I will not forsake our friend, while her difficulties are unsurmounted.

With what transports did I fly to seek the man my prudence has for some time past bid me shun, when I had news to communicate that I knew would give the most heart-felt pleasure to our Maria!

He was, I could perceive, astonished at my behaviour ; for I perfectly raved when I touched upon my dear father's and mother's returning happiness, but well remember I called the ticket theirs, my mind disclaiming it from the instant I knew it was a prize ; but told him, in a wild manner, that nothing should remove me from the convent—not even the meeting those long-lost parents, and being witness of their unhopèd-for felicity, until my continuance therein ceased to be serviceable to my friends.

His Lordship looked every thing you can conceive of approbation, but had too much delicacy to compliment me on finding me alive to the feelings of nature ; and so unable have I been ever since your letter arrived to compose myself,

myself, that I fancy I am set down by all that see me for a lunatic.—They say, indeed, there is “a pleasure in madness which none but madmen know,” and I begin to be of the same opinion: yet I much wish this foolish fluttering heart of mine could get the better of its *visible* palpitation; for I cannot desire to subdue, I would only moderate, my joy.

I thank you a thousand times for the trouble you have taken, and kiss Mrs. Ashley's hands on the occasion with far different zeal to what these finished actors and actresses kiss the *holy* relicks in this *holy* mansion.

I know nothing of our friends, and can, with certainty, write nothing concerning them, except that they are well, and continue, in every respect, in their usual uneasy circumstances.

You will, my dear Madam, be so kind as to do the needful, as to the hundred-pound bill I have told my father and mother is, or shall be, enclosed in their letter, and believe me to be,

Your, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XLIII.

Miss GERRARD to *Miss* FREEMAN.

IF I was Louisa, with all my beauty, understanding, &c. &c. I should not be pleased with Lord D. for so highly approving another,

as he openly and repeatedly professes he does our Niobe. Filial affection, my dear Nancy, is the most lovely feature in a young woman's character, and, without doubt, as this nobleman affirms, the least deceitful evidence of the goodness of the heart.—Never was countenance or language, he says, so animated, so amiable as hers this morning: though, he adds, he was so struck and so affected by her behaviour, that he did not once open his mouth.

Louisa, poor soul!—(oh, she will be the most *convenient piece of virtue* of a wife that ever man was united to!)—shed a tear of pleasure at the description, and declared, she should always be happy to prove to the young American how much she admired her, and thought herself obliged to her.

Now suffer me to return into myself, and trouble you, as usual with my troubles.

Mr. Venols has taken his long and fatiguing journey in vain; for some wretches, in the wantonness of their ridicule, I suppose, of the superstitious part of the Catholic religion, did, it is discovered, at the last public funeral, rob the dormitory of some *invaluable* relicks, and bore them off in their unhallowed hands. In consequence of this indignity and insult, it is ordered that none but the blessed sisterhood and the holy fathers shall henceforth enter therein; and that the keys shall be kept by the household priest, who is to survey the solemn premises every succeeding night, before he retires to sleep, to prevent every outrage and future sacrilege.

And

And yet, Nancy, in the midst of my disappointment, I cannot refuse my assent to the suggestion, that this is the second interposition of unforeseen incidents to prevent my taking the extraordinary preparation—Heaven's will, therefore, be done ! says reason and religion ; but human nature is impatient of delays, from being incapable of distinguishing between the blessing and the chastisement, when thus disguised, and exclaims, in the bitterest anguish, “ Shall I, then, shall I never get out of this hateful, this dire mansion ? ”

I have, however, had frequent cause to remark, that, when finite powers are exhausted, infinite have perfected the work.—We now stand in the same critical and unpromising, though not uncheerful or alarming, predicament, as before these gentlemen started in our cause—our household father, moreover, lies in that condition, which, though it forbids all hopes of recovery, does not threaten a hasty dissolution of the patient ; and the deputy, besides the *perfections* I have described to you, is haughty, imperious, and quite the man in office.

Not a step can, however, be taken by any friend on earth to prove salutary ; for, was you to publish the irregularities, the vices of the convent, the tale might, perhaps, be believed in England ; but it would gain no credit in France : and who is it that could compel a great monarch to strike at the religion, or abolish the established customs of his realm, to to please the seeming caprice of a girl, who petitioned for permission to take the veil, and

is now become eager to return to the world, and, in order to gain her point, traduces the holy fathers, ridicules the holy rights, and impeaches the holy mother and sisterhood?—the light in which my conduct would be placed, and the turn these base people would give to the whole affair: therefore, if strata-gem fails us, we must bow the head, and drag on our galling chain to the end of our existence. I have besought the happy Niobe (for Niobe I shall ever call her) to apprise our absent traveller and friend, the too agreeable Venols, of the change in our domestic policy—Yet what effect can that produce?—This wicked Lady Abbess will not let him re-enter this dome, unless in the character of her paramour, and would even then, perhaps, be capable of bringing some impious charge against him, on the least neglect or disgust.

From this consideration, however his absence may wound, I prefer the wound that is without consequence, to healing the surface, whilst the gangrene lurks beneath.

I think we trespass too much on Miss Smith's good-nature, by permitting her to live only for us—Shall we not, Nancy, sacrifice our selfish gratifications to the feelings, the wishes of a fond and worthy father and mother to behold an only child that deserves their tenderest affection, and will repay their tenderest attentions with interest?—We will, we will; and do you persuade her (for your pen can do much) to suffer her greater concerns to take place of the lesser; her filial duty, since they cannot be reconciled, to supersede what she calls

calls the duties of friendship.—My Lord shall second your motion ; for since she so nobly forgets herself, it is but just we should remember what is due both to her happiness and her honour.

I always thought your father a good-natured man ; but, till your late accounts of him, never conceived he was any thing like so liberal-minded as he has proved himself, no less by his manner of receiving Mrs. Athley's refusal of him, than the acts of goodness he has done to my miserable mother. Could I get out of my cage, who knows but I might be tempted to set my cap at him myself ? But I fear I should never be able to engage him to make a transfer of his affections. Besides—But it was fit an ugly recollection should punish me, should mortify me, for my idleness and folly in thus playing with an amiable, a serious subject.

Should Mr. Venols return, and have any useless time upon his hands, I will persuade him to take a trip to England.—You would not, surely, be cruel, if he should look up to you with aspiring hopes ; he admires your person, (face I should say, for that is all your miniature contains) and your understanding must have abundant charms for him ; nor do I indeed, see where either of you could do better.

Was I, my dear, at liberty to dispose of myself, he would, of all men I have ever beheld, be the object of my choice ; and, had I an empire to my dower, and was properly persuaded our affection was mutual, he should not sue in vain.

I often wonder the Little Niobe is overlooked, by him ; her youth alone can be the impediment to his approbation of her : for, upon my word, she is grown to a very tolerable height, is uncommonly genteel, and, except when Louisa is present, quite a lovely girl. I think it is Mr. Addison, who affirms sensibility of countenance to be the grand essential to beauty : and that where the softer, the finer passions of the soul are conspicuous, there the irresistible *some-what* is found.—No countenance, Nancy, can boast more eminently than Miss Smith's, this silent eloquence, this captivating grace ; for, as some author expresses it, she has

“ *An eye all lightning, and a face all tongue :*”

yet does Venols behold her only in the light of an amiable child ; and Lord D—, though he can discover all her perfections, has *seen* Louisa, and is therefore entirely out of the question.—This, methinks, is merely a letter of how-do-you and chat, but its kind reception will be ensured, when I add that it comes from,

Your, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER XLIV.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss GERRARD.

I Have, my dear girl, had a most difficult task to dissuade your mother from quitting her present agreeable situation for the declared purpose

purpose of throwing herself into a convent—she talks incessantly of your felicity, and has taken pains to raise her imagination to a very uncommon pitch of enthusiasm, for one that is resolved her religious faith shall be unre-nounced, tho' she should become an inhabitant of a religious dome.

I observed to her, that, though I *hoped* every thing was comfortable to those persons who had bid a final adieu to the world, I had my suspicions that the mixture of good and bad pensioners could not always be agreeable; and that I apprehended it was much more in her power to live to her taste in society, than on a spot which at best must be circumscribed, and want that first of all charms, variety, to recommend it to permanent approbation. But though she at last appears rather better satisfied, I am afraid the sense of obligations weighs stronger on her mind than the sense of conviction, and induces her to be silent where she finds her wishes opposed by every friendly or rational argument.

Your mother, Maria, as you have often observed, does not want for understanding; I therefore suspect, that the more she becomes acquainted with herself, the less she will like retirement.

Company, cards, scandal, places of polite amusement, and the whole catalogue of such things as constitute the happiness of those who cannot *think*, keep the mind at a distance from home; but when a new situation compels us to listen to our mental monitor, we are alarmed, and, instead of being inclined to regulate

and correct what this still voice represents to be amiss, are anxious to fly the chaos a little resolution would reduce to beauty and order.

I was much more concerned than surprized to find, so soon as her sadness was worn off, that your mother should grow weary of Mrs. Ashley's system of living, and sigh for the world.

Chearfulness, though infinitely preferable to mirth, as the one exhausts, the other exhilarates the spirits, is often miscalled the dead calm of existence; but, however our amiable friend may be incapable of noisy joy, or festive revelry, she has a turn for all that is entertaining or valuable in the human intercourse. But, not to labour the point unnecessarily, she is the very reverse of your near relation; nor will any melancholy change or chance render your mother *steady* or *uniform*, beyond the period that she feels herself oppressed or crushed by it.

What I mean, then, by this information, is, to prepare you for her instability, and to tell you, you must not flatter yourself that your report of the Nunnery you are in will have its due effect on her heart, or your escape meet with her commendation; for, when once she has adopted an opinion, no arguments on earth can prevail on her to renounce it.

I have written in the best manner I am capable of to Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and have my eye already on a spot that I dare believe their good sense will think eligible for their place of residence—but what to say about our Niobe's
continuance

continuance or discontinuance in the convent, I am wholly at a loss.

The equity of the business, I think, with you, is clearly against the necessity for detaining her; yet how to supply her loss, except Lord D—— would condescend to be my occasional correspondent, and either give me, himself, a full and particular account of all that passes, or, what is exactly the same thing, find a mode of conveyance for your intelligent epistles—could this, I repeat, be brought into proper train, I do not see wherein we could suffer by her making her father and mother compleatly happy by her presence; and if my Lord D—— makes a right, as well as a good-natured use of this hint, the dear girl's scruples must yield to filial regard and filial attention. Besides, should any unlucky card start in your affairs, who can tell what cruel suspicions might be fastened on her friendly shoulders, or how far the tyranny of these religious is able to extend, when they are provoked to wrath? Let a council therefore be called, and, having given the matter a fair discussion, take your measures accordingly, nor doubt of my approbation.

Mrs. Ashley professes to know but one allay to her contentment; and that is, the difficulties you labour under, which appear rather to multiply on your heads, than in any degree to be obviated. But be not discouraged; Providence may open you an avenue, as you observe, where and when you least expect it, and bring you to the wishes, the arms of

Your, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

L E T T E R XLV.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

HOW shall I tell you, my dearest Madam, the new calamity that has fallen upon us!

In consequence of your last letter, Lord D. sought an interview with me, and set the circumstances of my departure, the necessity, the advantage of it, in such a light, and pledged his honour so solemnly to be every thing I had been, of letter-writer, letter-conveyancer, and go-between, on all occasions to our friends, that I submitted to their unanimous voice and better judgment, and begged an audience with our Superior for the purpose of breaking the way to my enlargement.

I was admitted into the parlour, where, with a somewhat of ceremony I did not comprehend, was the Lady Abbess and the deputy household father ready to receive me.

Having paid my proper compliments to her on her recovery, I began to let her know my good fortune, and my father and mother's expected arrival from Ireland; then, nothing doubting, added that it was my intention to be in London early enough to receive them.

The first part of my intelligence, I could perceive, was highly agreeable to them; but the conclusion threw her Ladyship into very uncommon ill-humour—She had conceived, she said, my visit to that parlour had proceeded
from

from very different motives than a desire of quitting the convent—Had I so little profited by father Stephen's conversation as to seek a world to which I had been so long a stranger?

I was startled, but with a pretty tolerable grace, I believe, observed that nature had its ties; my dear father and mother were restored to me in so unhopèd-for a manner as to be the next thing to a resurrection—I could not, indeed, deny that my mind had renounced many of its errors and its prejudices, but that, if I made them never so short a visit, I must see them before I could come to any resolution respecting that house.

Here they exchanged a significant glance—a glance, Madam, which I felt was unfavourable to my wishes; but, though I was prepared for every argument their art or ingenuity could suggest, I never once thought they could dare to detain me by force, when they knew my relations were at hand to demand me. Judge, then, of my grief and astonishment, when, after many strokes of *finesse*, which I flattered myself I had dexterously parried, I was told that they could not answer it either to their king or the church, that so young a lady, who had voluntarily staid many months under a holy roof, should return to the temptations and dangers of the world—but, that I might not suppose myself hardly dealt by, they would immediately draw up a case and get it directly presented: and the opinion thereon must be their rule of conduct.

I have not words, my dear Madam, to describe the indignation, the horror, I felt at this moment; but, recollecting I had friends in the house, and that rage and remonstrance would be equally unavailing, I retired in profound silence, and left them to their cruel and wicked machinations.

My Lord has so much friendship for me, that he turned pale at my report of the reception and treatment I had met with—"Is this the reward, cried he"—But I interrupted him with observing, what I now do to you, Madam, that I am only under my original predicament, though I knew it not till my desire of going to England brought on an explanation; for that the woman who placed me in the convent surely meant to trepan me into taking the veil, and imagining my father and mother could never come to claim me, introduced me as a religious victim.

In about an hour after this blessed audience, it was signified to me, by one of the assistant nuns, that I must neither write nor receive a single epistle, but through their indulgence, and under the inspection of the Superior; nor must I think of going out on any occasion.—I carelessly replied, it was very well; I would learn to submit to the higher powers.

This act of despotism gave me no pain, as Lord D—— will always open a door to our correspondence: nay, he gives me hope that no step will be taken against me without his concurrence, and that therefore it will always be in his power to defeat the malice of my enemies and their wicked schemes.

Except

Except being a prisoner, I have, however, nothing to complain of—the most insinuating arts are practised to win me to their purposes ; but I bear an antidote about me, and despise all their assays of that nature.

My Lord D——, in order to keep up my spirits, laughs, and assures me that he will prove himself as warm a champion in my cause as in the cause of the other distressed damsels, my beloved friends ; nor does he fear but he shall hit upon the necessary means for dissolving our enchantment in a few weeks at least. May he not, as many able politicians have done before him, mistake his wishes for his abilities, and I shall at last be happy !

Miss Gerrard is, as I expected, over-whelmed with concern on my account—she calls herself the fatal author of my imprisonment, and talks of not surviving the confirmation of my sentence.—If there was no help at hand, I should follow her to the utmost depths of her apprehension—but I persuade myself Lord D. will raise me some powerful friends both at court and with the *holy* see, that I shall not be lost.

A nun ! Heaven defend us ! How well qualified I am by nature for a nunnery ! My vivacity, and so I will tell them, would corrupt the whole sisterhood—But at the last extremity, if there is such a thing as making a nun of me without my own consent, or either direct or indirect concurrence, I shall not be the miserable wretch they seek to make me, so long as my Maria remains within these walls ; nay, our converse on that event would not be forbidden,

bidden, our interviews stolen, or our union impracticable.—But, my dear, dear father and mother!—must I never see you more?—The pen, Miss Freeman, drops from my hand—my tears are not to be suppressed—I feel all the danger, the misery, of my entanglement, and shall——

Somebody knocks at the door—how unfit am I to be seen! But I must deceive the deceivers, and appear content with my chains.

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My visitor was Father Stephen, Madam, alias Lord D—. He had, as he expected, been called into the consultation, where after many *pros* and *cons*, and misrepresentations of my conduct, he was required to fulfil the work he had begun, and no less secure my body by signing the memorial that was to obtain the royal mandate for my detention, than my soul by his ghostly visitations and arguments.—I smiled through my tears to think I was so happy in a spiritual father, and told him I put my salvation into his hands—but was surprised at his ill-timed galantry in saluting me after the manner of the sisterhood, when he knew the whole of my behaviour to be a joke.

My thoughts were soon called off from this, perhaps, false delicacy, by his declaring he knew not how to act. Dispatches of every kind, by means of what were called flying couriers, were so speedily interchanged in France, that the best-concerted *detour* would create suspicion, and my effecting my escape was,

was, he feared, utterly impossible. I might, indeed, depend on every thing in his power ; but how far that power might reach, was, under my circumstances, a very alarming consideration : he would, however, see Venols, who was returned from his unfinished journey, (letters describing the change in the convent regulations having overtaken him before he got to Rome,) and they would deliberate on the affair.

He then took occasion to observe, that his Louisa was grown pensive and reserved without any visible reason, consequently the alteration could not be beheld by him but with distress. —I imputed it solely to the slow progress they made in their favourite scheme of returning to the world. Possibly it might be partly the cause, he replied ; but he had his alarming presentiment, which he durst trust to no ear but mine, and that was, that, however she might get clear of the religious house, her religious vow, her vow of celibacy, would be with great difficulty removed from off her conscience.

Much more chat of this kind succeeded during the time he staid with me, in order to give my enemies a high idea of his zeal and assiduity—he discovered a fund of good sense in me (from agreeing with him in every particular) he had never before been aware of—that I was a good girl, a fine girl, and deserved to be happy.

Perhaps you will say it was well for me that my disagreeable predicament prevented my *feeling* these compliments other than as good-natured supports ; for I can honestly assure you
that

that was the only light in which they reached my heart, and I barely thought myself obliged to him for his endeavours to comfort me.

What will become of my poor father and mother, when they find all their fair prospects thus obscured?—The child of their hopes, of their tenderest affection, their only child—I dare not dwell on the reflection—my brain is not strong enough to bear their sufferings, tho' I can bend to my own. Oh! now, Madam, now is the time to be a friend indeed!—soothe them with the expectations of my being restored to them—place my continuance here to my friends account—any thing, every thing, rather than give them the excruciating pangs the even imagined loss of her they would die to preserve would occasion them.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER XLVI.

From Lord D— to Miss FREEMAN.

Madam,

YOU will, I fear, be startled at receiving a letter from a new correspondent; but our sweet Miss Smith is confined to her bed by a fever—a circumstance she will not permit me to communicate to your friend, lest it should too deeply strike on her generous heart from conceiving herself the innocent and unhappy cause.

In

In the character I have assumed (tho' be assured, Madam, no mock vows have passed my lips; for, conscious I should be only a temporary priest, I *purchased* every necessary dispensation) no access is denied me, or visitations thought particular, where conversation is the colour of my conduct.

I felt her pulse, and found them in such a state, that I feared a delirium would succeed; and what discoveries she might make during a suspension of her reason, was a frightful consideration.

Stimulated by this prospect of danger, I boldly proposed to the Superior to watch all the night by her bed-side, in order to take advantage of her mind, in its subdued state from her bodily disorder, for her salvation; and, that I might converse with less reserve, I advised that the attendant nun should sit up in the next apartment.

This was not only agreed to, but my zeal applauded.—The difficulty then was, to prevail on the lovely girl to permit me to act as nurse—however, the having a nun at hand to supply my deficiencies, and the whisper that I had something of importance to communicate, by degrees got the better of her objections, and convinced her it was best to comply with my request; I therefore took up my station accordingly.

She continued tolerably composed, tho' her fever ran high, till midnight, when, as I apprehended, it began to effect her brain, the first testimony of which was, her mistaking me
for

for you, and telling me a particular which shall ever be buried in my bosom.

All this passed in an under-tone of voice ; for she dreaded, she said, we might be overheard. She pressed my hand many times for yours—Oh ! Madam, she is the noblest minded and most amiable creature on earth.

At length she mentioned such things as would have ruined all our schemes, there was so much matter of fact, of good sense, in all her wildnesses and incoherences ; but you was the favourite object, and was still reverted to in every little pause her disturbed imagination experienced.

I gave her a powder which had been salutary to myself in a feverish attack, and which, through all its disguises, I believe to be James's ; and it had soon the desired effect : a profuse perspiration came on, which abated the violence of her fever, and restored her, by degrees, to calmness, if not soundness of mind, and was succeeded by so fine a sleep, that it was plain the crisis was over.

On her awaking, she had some confused traces of her wanderings, and seemed much chagrined ; but on my repeating to her every thing she had uttered, except the article she anxiously wished, I dare say, should be concealed, she became satisfied, but insisted upon it I should leave her.

I have been every half-hour, since my banishment from her chamber, to enquire how she goes on, and have the satisfaction to hear she mends, though but slowly.—I have amused Miss Gerrard with a thousand fictions relative

lative to her confinement, and must take care her Little Niobe's cheek does not meet her eye until its native bloom is restored.

Good heavens! what have not these people to answer for, from their persecutions of the young and friendly, and thus either precipitating their hearts into the deepest distress, or betraying them into compliances that wound their peace for ever?

I am charged with no affectionate or friendly remembrances; and for this plain reason, that my writing is unknown to every party.—I was afraid, my lovely patient, if I had told her my intention, would think herself ill-treated, unless she perused my epistle; and I had certain insurmountable reasons for offending her in that particular: but you, Madam, will use your own discretion now it is beyond her reach—though, was I worthy to advise a lady of your understanding, or guide her on any occasion, I should say, let the liberty I have taken with you be an everlasting secret.

When Mr. and Mrs. Smith arrive, please to intrust me with breaking the intelligence, with due caution, to their daughter; for her sensibility is much too strong for her delicate frame, and, if not regulated by friendly attentions, will, I fear, prove fatal.—I have, Madam, the sincerest esteem for her: the highest admiration of her conduct and principles: and shall, hereafter, wear her next my Louisa in my heart. I humbly beg your pardon, Miss Gerrard's, and sister Louisa's; but considering her extreme youth, I cannot think Nature has produced, through all her works,
such

such another faultless being—And may she long live to enjoy the blessing of your friendship! for she calls your friendship the first blessing of her existence.

I am, Madam,

With all imaginable respect,

&c. &c.

D—.

LETTER XLVII.

Miss FREEMAN to Lord D ———.

I Thank your Lordship for remembering me, though on so melancholy an occasion. Mrs. Ashley and myself have shed abundance of tears for the amiable Miss Smith's sufferings. Her youth, however, and the kind attentions paid her, is a rest for our hopes; but how to manage with respect to her father and mother, is a point that puzzles, that distresses me beyond measure.

I received a letter from them a few hours before your's arrived, informing me they shall leave Ireland the first fair wind, and hope to meet their dear child in London.

'Till the moment the dear girl was a prisoner, I had fifty, what I thought plausible excuses to make for her continuance in the Nunnery; but now my heart and countenance will, I fear, too faithfully correspond for me to acquit myself as I could wish. Besides, my Lord, on revolving the matter in my mind, I do not think it safe or wise, to
make

make them acquainted with the uneasy, condition of our friends: the parental feelings would be too much alive to Miss Smith's danger, if they once knew the deep-laid artifices, the internal designs, of religious houses, to let her remain there, though on the noblest motives; and I need not advert to the fatal consequence, if they should resolve to fetch home their entrapped child. But, surely, the French King will never countenance such an outrage!—Yet who could call him to account for it?—The Americans cannot at this crisis, and the English *dare* not, however loyal a subject her father might be proved.

I have, by their own desire, engaged a sweet pretty retreat for them in the environs of this metropolis, Mr. Smith's health being rather in a declining state, and their daughter's company was to be the cordial drop of his existence—How shall I be able to look them in the face! conscious as I am that my persuasions have largely contributed to pull down this greatest of all misfortunes on their heads—What can I say?—What can we do to save them from this unapprehended, this crushing evil?

My poor Maria too—her anguish will in all probability hurt her health; and thus I shall destroy those I most love, and for whose sake I would cheerfully brave the utmost peltings of their surrounding storms.

Indeed, indeed, my good Lord, I am astonished at your perseverance in a business that promises so little, or at least, such slow success, as the deliverance of Louisa and Maria.

—Can

—Can you resolve to wear out your days in a convent and disappoint the hopes of your worthy uncle, who looks up to you as the last prop of your illustrious house? Your father has now been dead above two years, and you have never done more in all that time than visit your friends and country for a few days. You are, moreover, a standing dish for chat at most of the polite tea-tables in town, where 'tis positively concluded that some jay of Italy holds you in ignoble chains.—I am on tenterhooks when I hear you thus traduced, but dare not vindicate you, lest my breath should do you more prejudice than even the foul breath of slander.—Come then yourself and dispel the clouds which have gathered round your reputation; but, ah! come not without your fair friends in your train! You will clearly perceive the shallow artifice I have descended to practice—Your generosity I feel, and confess it wants no quickening—You are prudent, I am impatient—you are judicious, I am absurd!—But forgive a woman's fears, a woman's anxiety, that, if you do not soon break the bondage of our friends, it will become impossible for you ever to accomplish it. I shudder at my own temerity in thus opening the weakness of my character unto you; but I trust you will pity, pardon, and believe me to be, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER

L E T T E R XLVIII.

From the Same to the Same.

MR. and Mrs. Smith, my Lord, are arrived safe in London—arrived in a luckless hour; for I am unable to produce their child, without whose presence, notwithstanding the happy change in their circumstances, they feel themselves but half blessed.

I pleaded my not expecting them so soon as the cause of their disappointment; and said, that, as there were two young and amiable Ladies to my certain knowledge from England in the convent, with whom Miss Smith had formed a tender friendship, I did suppose they would all come together.

This, in some degree, satisfying them, I begged leave to introduce Mrs. Ashley to their acquaintance, and never was pleasure greater than they enjoyed from this good woman's account of their Arabella's improvements. Mr. Smith said he should rejoice in an opportunity of dividing his fortune with some man of merit, that would ensure his poor girl a protector when he should be no more—but I am of opinion an object worthy such a prize as her hand, will not easily be met with.

Mrs. Ashley, who is the comforter of the distressed where-ever she comes, has, at the request of this worthy couple, taken up her residence under their roof, in order, as much as possible, to soften the interval of suspense
and

and parental longing. Let me, my Lord, let me intreat you to exert yourself on this one occasion, for pity's sake! for justice! for friendship's sake! Miss Gerrard and the fair Louisa threw themselves into the arms of a convent, but Miss Smith is the victim of the most unparalleled good-nature and resolution that ever the human heart was fraught with—she must, then, be delivered at what price it may, and I cast her wholly on your goodness.

I have a piece of news for my Maria, that will both astonish and mortify her—her mother is going to be married a third time, and to a methodist parson.

I thought I perceived, indeed, for some time passed, a change in her manners, but little suspected from what source her pious resignation was derived.—I must desire your Lordship will not only kindly inform her of the circumstance, but persuade her to give up every expectation of finding a mother, if she should ever get amongst us, and to resolve to keep the secret of her elopement, and let this strange woman enjoy the annuity she cannot claim without danger.

I should blush for the disgrace this woman's conduct brings on the sex, if I did not recollect that your Lordship has ocular demonstration that there are amiable as well as unamiable females.—I shall be happy to hear from Miss Smith so soon as she is able to write; for so timid a wretch am I, that, though far from an infidel with respect to your report, I shall not *feel* she is recovered, until I receive a letter from

from herself.—My best wishes attend all your enterprises !

I am, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER XLIX.

Miss SMITH to Miss FREEMAN.

I HAVE been ill, my dear Madam,—very ill, and have infinite obligations to Lord D——: he has been brother, friend, and nurse to me, and has kept all the secrets I entrusted him with, inviolate; nor does Miss Gerrard suspect any thing has been the matter with me, though I was brought to the verge of the grave.

I spend great part of my time in the garden, as air and exercise are prescribed me; and my Lord D—— sometimes condescends to join me: but, whatever is the meaning of it, his behaviour is greatly changed—he professes more esteem for me, but is not so lively or so free in his conversation as before my illness.—My poor head was greatly shook; and, I own, I was covered with confusion, from the apprehension something had escaped me—you will kindly imagine what I would say, and spare me the pain of writing it.

His manner of treating me, however, convinces me my fears have no foundation; for, instead of our former complaisance, business seems alone to bring us together—business
seems

seems alone the source and end of our conversation ; and we part as persons do who are engaged in important affairs, unreluctantly, and in order to prosecute the necessary steps on both sides with the assiduity required.

My spirits are yet too weak to bear much agitation ; I, therefore, restrain myself from enquiring after my father and mother. You will, I am certain, be every thing to them friendship can make you—but their poor hearts will suffer the deepest affliction, when they come to hear of my cruel captivity.

I now more than ever rejoice that I waved my property in the lottery-ticket to which they owe their present accommodation—a true knowledge of the matter would have abundantly embittered their enjoyment of it. The parental heart so tenderly feels every little proof of filial attention, and is so apt to forget that a good child finds its own in its parents felicity, that they would have magnified the act of common kindness into a miracle of duty and affection.—Thus, you see, my dear Madam, every thing happens for the best.

I find myself fatigued, and must lay aside my pen for some short time before I can conclude my letter.

* * * * *

And from what righteous motives can you conceive, Madam, I am to be detained for ever within these walls?—No other, I assure you, than jealousy and revenge!—Some one, it seems, put it into this bad woman our Superior's

perior's head, that I of all God's creatures was her rival, the object of Mr. Venols's admiration; and that it was to me she was indebted for his insensibility towards her, his absence from the convent, and every consequential mortification.

This intelligence is worth a jew's-eye—my Lord picked it out of her favorite attendant at confession, and promises me he will make his advantage of it—Hence a ray of hope, my dear Madam, breaks in upon me, and I feel myself already warmed by the parental embrace.

Mr. Venols has taken up his residence at a neighbouring village, and in that article of conduct I am also supposed to be the magnet; therefore, to prevent my enlargement is the ultimatum of this *pious* lady's wishes.

What machines we are!—Every countenance, I mean in our friendly circle, is lighted up with gladness on this discovery: and my Lord is to visit his friend in the evening for the purpose of settling their consequential plan of operation.

I am so much better you cannot imagine, nor do I doubt but I could undertake my journey this very hour, if it was permitted me; for should I not be on the wing to meet the best and tenderest of parents?

My Lord politely tells me he shall miss me, but that the recollection I am happily got out of the harpy's gripe will make ample amends for his private loss.

I am on the pinnacle of expectation—the rack, I might have said: a few hours will,
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however, decide my destiny and make me either the happiest or most miserable of beings. But it would be unpardonable to leave you in suspense, or give Mrs. Ashley's heart one unnecessary pang—I will not, then, on any consideration, send this letter till I know my fate; and believe me, Madam, for all our sakes, after what has happened, I will not trifle a moment with my good fortune, but, if a friendly hand should be able to open my cage, fly away instantaneously for England.

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Now I am again your Little Niobe—O ! my dear Madam, I know not how to sustain these trying transitions, and have ever found joy the hardest task to acquit myself of with propriety.

Mr. Venols no sooner understood the case than he undertook to relieve it — a letter of penitence and love was the charm that opened this old Jezebel's heart to mercy ; which was not only received with rapture, but had a most gracious answer returned to it, with an appointment to breakfast with her in the morning.

Lord D—— waited the event of this overture with the most friendly agitations, and, finding it succeed to his utmost wish, hastened home to bless me with the tidings—“ Let your Miss Freeman, Madam, said he, (what a cold appellation for the Little Niobe—Madam !—) be instantly made acquainted with the happy turn in your affairs ; for Venols, forgiven, will

will have sufficient influence to obtain your liberty.—I will take care your letter shall be forwarded with all expedition, and may no cloud arise to darken your now fair prospect !”

—So saying he left me. Here, Madam, you will be pleased to observe, here was no taking by the hand, no saluting as I once described to you, not even the salute of congratulation—We are therefore got into the right train, and I have only one trial more to go through—Can I, ought I to write it—but I am too far advanced to recede—It is, then, the bidding adieu to all my good friends—to this most agreeable Lord, whom I shall never behold again until he is the husband of his Louisa !—Adieu, my dearest Madam ! I will rest my frailties on your pity and confidence, and hasten to receive your personal instructions how to conquer them for ever.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

L E T T E R L.

From the Same to the Same.

MR. Venols, Madam, was punctual to his appointment, but did not think it safe to touch immediately the string on which all my hopes are suspended.

He is now to visit the convent occasionally, as usual ; and his enamorata, it seems, laments she did not get him made the deputy househol-

der, but will cast about, in order to produce room for him as soon as possible.

After a couple of days spent in suspense, I entered the parlor, as per *pre-instruction*, when this pious pair were enjoying a tête-a-tête, and talking over their prospects of future felicity—He affected to start—and my Lady Abbess chid me for my want of respect, in breaking in on her privacy, and I hastened out as fast as possible.

On my shutting the door after me, Venols asked how long that prying girl was to remain in the convent?—"She was evermore crossing me like my evil genius, said he, when I formerly visited here; and as for making her a catholic, that is not, I am persuaded, in the power of human eloquence—not from any reasonable objections to the religion, but downright obstinacy and perverseness of temper."

The Superior smiled upon him—"Do you really then wish she should go?" said she—"Could she doubt it," was the reply, when it was not in his power to pay a single visit to the parlor unannoyed by her impertinence?—"Then, cried she, all is well, and and we will send for Father Clement, and talk him out of the opinion he has adopted, that she ought never to be suffered to escape these walls—Yet stay, exclaimed she, there is something still more important to be done; for, if Father Stephen, whom I commissioned to apply for a holy detainer, has dispatched our paper for that purpose, it will not be in my power to get rid of her, however necessary to my convenience.

The

The bell was rung, and Father Stephen requested to give them his company, who, on hearing the cause of the Lady's anguish, instantly removed it by declaring he never could meet with a proper conveyance for the memorial, and that it was then in his hands. It was, Madam, burnt by mutual consent on the spot, Father Stephen confirming his friend's assertion, that I was a spy, and would, sooner or later, bring disgrace on the whole house.

The Lady was for having me called, and told I was at liberty to go where I pleased; but Lord D—— opposed that motion, as he could not trust me to receive such good news publicly, but undertook, in rather lofty terms, which, he said, would best correspond with the dignity of the house, to inform me of her resolution, and give some ghostly council for my future conduct in life.

This was agreed to on all sides (though, by the by, Father Clement was left out of the consultation); and at twelve o'clock at night, I was told Father Stephen desired I might be 'waked, for that he had something particular to say to me. The *pious* father was accordingly admitted, and my jailor, with the customary complaisance on these occasions, waited in the anti-chamber—His Lordship looked so grave, I little suspected what he had to say to me.

“ I am come, Arabella, said he, to give you a short exhortation—Life is full of vicissitudes! to day we weep, to-morrow rejoice! now are captives, and then obtain our enlargement! and we ought to prepare ourselves for every event! Remember, therefore, when the

world shall have taken hold of your heart, that the world itself must pass away, and leave no traces behind!

“ You have lived so long within these walls, that you can be no stranger to the peace and happiness they contain—let me conjure you, when the world’s emptiness disgusts you, not to hesitate a moment where to shelter your head! So long as I live, this house shall be your blessed asylum whenever you are disposed to seek it; but I am enjoined to tell you, that, as a punishment of your obduracy, to-morrow morning throws you back on the rough ocean of life, and may you escape every threatening shipwreck!—A French Lady, who leaves this place four hours hence, will see you safe to Calais, and put you under the care of some proper person to conduct you to your relations; so that you have no time for sleep, and I will only say one short prayer over you at parting, that you may arise and make the necessary preparations for your journey.—Commend me to your friends in England, and tell them they cannot wish better to your temporal than I do to your eternal happiness.”

At these words he knelt down, and prayed, I believe; but I was so astonished and delighted that I lost my faculties, and was only roused by his retiring with the kindest and solemnest blessing I ever heard in my life, adding at the conclusion, “ If you are only as good in the world as you have been in the convent, you will deserve to be canonized.”—This he spoke in a low voice, and left me to weep with joy—with sorrow—for do I not

not leave Miss Gerrard behind?—leave her without the possibility of bidding her adieu; nor shall I have an opportunity of thanking this generous nobleman as I ought.

I hastened to dress myself, but mistook every thing I wanted—and found, on enquiry, it was one o'clock—Some coffee was sent up to me, which I just tasted—and wish for, yet dread, the hour of my departure—

My things are now all packed up, by the good-natured assistance of one of the nuns, and it is near four.

All is happily over—the chaise, my dear Madam, is at the door—I come, I come—and will put my letter into the first post-house I arrive at, that I may prepare you to behold your old correspondent, and most affectionate Little Niobe.

I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER LI.

From the Same to the Same.

Dover.

YES, my dear Madam, I am safely landed at Dover; but, by the cruel kindness of my company, am obliged to *repose* myself, as they call it, for one night, lest the fatigue should be too much for me.—I have, nevertheless, a shield against fatigue. My dear father and mother are in London, and I can never repose

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but in their loved arms.—I will, however, try to tell you how I got here.

Lord D—— who had taken the trouble of sitting up for the purpose, met me on the stairs—I believe I forced my hand into his, from supposing it was his intention to squire me to my carriage and he gently whispered, “You leave many friends behind you, but you will find a worthy couple in London, impatiently expecting your arrival, that will make you ample amends. Keep up your spirits for their sakes for all our sakes; and when we meet again, I will thank you.”

A tear started to my eye—it stole down my cheek—and I felt the hand I had given him tremble—He lifted me into the chaise, and hastily retired.

The lady, who I found was an acquaintance of Father Stephen’s extolled his *piety* and understanding to the skies; and, in the course of our conversation, confessed to me, that, on his expressing a most earnest desire to have me safely and speedily conducted to Calais, she had *made* the journey to oblige him, though the Lady Abbess was given to understand it was an important call of her own, and that Father Stephen had accidentally come to the knowledge of it.—Thus chatting on, (for I opened not my mouth to her on any private subject,) did we reach the destined spot.

The packet, we were informed, was on the point of sailing, with an English family that were already embarked—on board we instantly went, and my conductress, with the ease and *nonchalance* of a French woman, having introduced

duced herself to the lady of that family, thus bespoke her in my behalf:

I was a young American, she said, of large fortune, who was just come out of a convent, had travelled all night, and was impatient to meet my father and mother, who were only arrived the week before, in London—so impatient, that she feared I should not remember sleep was as necessary to enable me to reach them, as the packet to waft me to the British shore.

To this florid speech she received a polite assurance, that all imaginable care should be taken of me; and to this assurance I owe my present detention in this town.—To-morrow night I shall, however, be lodged under the parental roof, if my joy will permit me; nor will I once look back till I am convinced that all this is not a dream, but, though flattering sweet, is real substantial happiness.

I am told I must conclude my letter with all expedition, if I would save the post; so can only add, how much I am, &c. &c.

A. SMITH.

LETTER LII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

JOY! a thousand times joy to my Nancy's heart, on the redemption of our common friend from everlasting bondage!—What a heavenly description do you give of her father

and mother! O how I long to kiss their hands! and will not, after the miracles I have been witness to, despair. Venols is now restored to us; nay, indeed, is ours without interruption; for his Lady mistress, the very night after our Niobe's departure was seized with a fever and fore throat, and is said to be in real and great danger.

The deputy, from the hopes of succeeding to the household *priestship*, however strange he might think the sudden resolution of sending away the little American, was, when he had it mentioned to him, perfectly compliant; and my Lord D. that a moment might not be lost, contrived to have her hurried off that very evening the Superior's consent was obtained, and sincerely rejoices in her safe arrival in London.

It is, I find, greatly feared, that the fever which the Lady Abbess has been attacked with, will run through the convent. Two nuns are already ill, and five scholars, and every one wears the face of apprehension. But I have too long thought myself dead for death to have any terrors for me, and shall therefore wait its approach with true resignation.

The sensible Miss Smith could conquer what you represented to her was a dangerous and unworthy inclination, but I tho' bound by vows of the most sacred kind to know no love but that of God, feel myself every hour more and more attached to this agreeable Venols, who pretty roundly insinuates I am the woman of his choice, and that the price of
my

my enlargement shall be my hand. You, my dear girl, shall teach him a new lesson, and at once reward him for all he has done for me, and save me from self-contempt.

I am so relieved by Niobe's release, that I am scarcely sensible of my own chains—for to have known her the sacrifice of her goodness, and her father and mother the victims of their parental tenderness, would, I am satisfied, have brought me with sorrow to the grave.

I grieve to think of my poor mother's infatuation—A third husband!—Good heavens! Yet she is still my mother, and though I may weep, I ought not to censure her conduct, but do her all the service I can at a distance; for I think with you, that it would be madness to inform her of my escape from this mansion, if escape I should; for she that can think of a third husband—but I have done, and will go and chat a little while with Louisa before I conclude my letter; for this subject, Nancy, has unhinged me.

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Gracious God! what a Tartarus, as I have more than once called this hated house, am I fallen into?

I sought Louisa, as I told you I would, on quitting my writing, and I know not how it was, but one chat or other prevented my returning to my letter, until it was time to retire to bed, and try to lose the sense of all our inquietudes in sleep.

At

At five in the morning I was roused by a most violent bustle—a child had been found murdered in a neighbouring cell, where a nun, who proclaimed herself its mother, was tearing her hair and wringing her hands over it in all the agonies of grief and despair.

I hastened to the spot from a humane impulse, and found the fact just as it had been represented to me. Every one crossed themselves, and, as if afraid of infection, stood at a distance—the *holy* deputy superintendent shook her head, and giving orders that she should be watched by some of us, in order that she might be brought to condign punishment, withdrew to report the affair to the sick Superior.

The *pious* sisterhood, as if dreading contamination, dropped off one by one as fast as possible, until I was left alone with the young, beautiful, and wretched culprit.

I then approached her, and besought her to tell me the meaning of so melancholy a scene.

“ Unhappy one as I am, said she, it is four days since Nature, the kindest of assistants, made me the miserable mother of this now dead babe, which I cherished and most dexterously concealed till this fatal hour, when I was surprised in the performance of some maternal offices—severely reproved—and my lamp going out, my child’s life, either by design or accident, was lost—It expired without a groan, and my cruel visitor departed before I knew what had happened. He, however, hastily returned with a light, and offered to convey my dear departed one hence, and bury my shame and it together ; but I disdained his assistance,

assistance, as I must then have lived the paramour of perhaps, my child's murderer; and I rejoice in the certainty of my death, however ignominious, and am ready to suffer whatever dire punishment my violated vow and imputed inhumanity may draw upon me.

"One horrible thing the policy of the convent will secure me from—the torture: they wish not to know the father, though they will cut off the mother with an unrelenting hand."

I wept for her distress—"Beware, cried she, of shewing too much compassion for an out-cast; your tears may be construed into approbation of my conduct; nay, who knows, incite them to charge you with being an accomplice with me in the murder of a sweet babe I would have died to preserve.—I shall be excommunicated, anathematized, and then executed; but we shall go together, cried she, pressing the dead infant to her bosom!

"This, my sister, this is the justice, the charity of the religion we profess! The seducer, the spoiler, walks at large, while the poor helpless undone one is set up for a mark of infamy for many a similar but more fortunate sinner to shoot at, and at length dies, to strengthen the authority, and enforce the voice that bids *destroy!*"

I pressed her hand in sisterly pity, and in a few words received her little history; namely, that she was educated in a convent, and taught to believe there was no felicity without its walls. It being, moreover discovered to her, that

that, as she was not born in wedlock, she was entitled by the laws of her country, neither to relations nor provision,—she thought herself a wretched forlorn thing, and that the only way to secure herself from danger and guilt—the guilt of giving existence to innocents, who, like herself, would be alone in the creation—was to devote herself to her God.

This election was, according to custom, highly extolled; and mistaking spiritual vanity for a divine impulse, and without allowing herself time for reflection, she took the veil, when her misery (for she is now only a little turned of eighteen) soon began.

I left her with the promise, on a sister's coming to relieve me, to be her frequent visitor, so long as it was in my power.

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I have again looked in on our afflicted sister—she sits unmoved, and seems, as she professed to me, to consider her approaching fate as the blessed means of release from sin and suffering.

They would have torn her child from her, but it was at length granted to her earnest prayers, that they should be burnt together, on which account her execution will be precipitated; for oh! my dear Nancy, she will, in a few days, be brought up a public spectacle to the chapel in the morning, and at noon be conducted to the fatal stake. It however appears, that, if she was one of those nuns who have large incomes settled on the convent during

during their *lives*, the whole affair would have been hushed up by the Lady Abbess and priests—it is only the poor and friendless that are made examples of. She is sweetly intelligent, and has a most elegant person; and would, I am persuaded, in any other situation, have proved an honour to her sex, and a blessing to society: but she must die!—Surely, Heaven in its wrath suggested the idea of these baneful institutions; or are they not, my dear, the remains of the Roman barbarity—their vestal nymphs?

Where shall I hide myself or how endure the melancholy sight! for all the convent are to be witnesses of her death, and certain of the townspeople admitted to this ocular demonstration of the *purity* and rigor of its laws. Will no earthquake—But alas! it is only a common spectacle, a common transaction, where the *shame* of a sister cannot be concealed. Methinks the maternal tenderness of this fallen wretch atones for all her transgression—persecuted, betrayed, the first crime could hardly be imputed to her.—Her care of her infant was a voluntary act, and prosecuted at the hazard, the price of her own existence; nor will she find Heaven half so severe as her human judges.

Three more nuns have caught the fever; but, though violent, it is not always fatal.—One of the sisters first seized is, I hear given over; the other seems to be getting the better of the attack.—Two scholars are dead.

Our household father is become exceedingly troublesome to Louisa, and compelled her this morning

morning to make something like an assignation with him, at a late hour, in the confessional: she is, however, determined to feign herself ill, and thereby gain time, which is every thing in our circumstances.—Thus, my dear, speaking for a few individuals, which is as far as human knowledge generally extends, every evil has its attendant good; for, if this sickness had not visited the convent, Louisa's feigned indisposition might have been suspected by her holy enamorado, and reduced us to the dangerous extremity of calling in Lord D. and Mr. Venols to her protection.

I rejoice when I recollect our beloved Niobe is beyond the reach of this infection; for, had she fallen a sacrifice any way from her continuance on this spot, as her continuance was the genuine result of her friendship and humanity, I should never have ceased reproaching myself as the fatal cause.

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There is, Nancy, no life but social life.—Louisa and I have passed a comfortable hour together, and have divided our cares so happily, that their burthen is much reduced, or, in a great degree, fitted to our shoulders.

I have just visited the lovely culprit, and found her still undismayed; nay, a kind of heavenly tranquillity beams forth in her countenance: and if this is not greatness of mind, notwithstanding her guilt, it is, my dear, something so like it, as easily to be mistaken by the nicest observer.

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“Be assured, Madam, said she, your charity will be rewarded; your generous pity, which has in so large a degree contributed to my peace, will not be unremembered—Those who are equally culpable with myself, pronounce my sentence just; but your purity and knowledge of this wicked house inclines you to lament that I should die for wishing my child might live.

“Here, said she, rising, the dress in which I am to make my last procession is already brought me.—Think what the distress of soul must be, to subdue Nature’s pangs, and enable me to look on my robes of death with joy—but that my fellow-sufferer, my unoffending babe, must be wrapped up in this horribly-painted mantle, wounds me deeply—The God of heaven, Madam, will be invoked to behold us devoted by the *holy church* to the devil—but the God of heaven is just, is pitiful, and will mock their outrageous zeal; and long before the eyes of the hypocrite are satisfied with the finale of our tragedy, shall we be crowned with diadems of peace.

“Oh! weep not, my only friend—to punish me would have been to let me live, for I must then have received, as a lover, the murderer; but I will rush into the flames to avoid him, and find an everlasting asylum in the grave.”

She asked permission to salute me, and, taking her picture from her pocket, presented me with it. “This, said she, I myself copied from a miniature my undoer prevailed on me to sit for, when in the meridian of health and innocence

innocence—sometimes view it, and remember me ; but remember I have the best of it, for I shall be at the end of all my sorrows, whilst plots, innumerable, are formed to render you equally guilty, and equally undone.”

What trying interviews these are !—Yet I am callous :—to die, as this good creature affirms, is security ; to live, danger—Why, then should I rejoice in the difference of our conditions (her crime excepted) ?

A kind of amphitheatre is marked out in the center of the garden, with a double range of seats in the same order as the benches in a play-house, and, strange to tell, the front row is contended for.—May I be indulged with the most remote corner, where, shrinking from the horrid spectacle, I may weep unnoticed, and unnoticed return to my cell.—

Ah ! the bell tolls—the fatal summons for this devoted one to the chapel ; and I must attend her there.—I shall betray myself—I shall ; but I will resume my pen the moment I can get free from this heart-wounding procession.

* * * * *

Lord D. with humanity shining in his countenance, was the person, contrary to the expectation of every one present, who read the ceremony—and such a ceremony !—But methought every dreadful denunciation was changed into a blessing, by his manner of uttering them ; and the unhappy object, I fancy, caught my idea, by the serenity of her features.

features. She is not, my dear, to be executed till to-morrow morning.

Louisa and I mean to sit up with her all night, and give her every consolation and support we ourselves shall want; for no holy father will now approach her cell, nor should *we* saints be unpunished for our tenderness, were it to be known, for this child of hell, as the convent phrase is—but I defy their utmost malice, and shall laugh, if my excommunication proves to be the penalty.

I am impatient to see Venols—Sure, either he or my Lord will steal to us in this hour of sorrow—What can have removed our household Levite? Can he be ill? What a fearful account has he to make up! and, enemy as I know he is to our Louisa, I sincerely pray he may have time to repent.

I will seal up this letter, whether I send it or not—But there is no appeal from convent condemnation, and this is not the age for miracles; therefore, you may conclude, that, long before you receive it, the sweetly-penitent sinner is released from sad mortality and infernal persecution.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER LIII.

From the Same to the Same.

MY dearest Nancy, with what delight am I now sat down to tell you that Providence has not forgotten to be gracious.

At

At twelve o'clock, when the whole convent was wrapped in darkness and silence, Lord D—— came to my cell, and finding it deserted, was not at a loss to guess how I was employed.

He tapped gently at sister Frances's door, (the name of the poor condemned one, and besought me to let him speak a word with me in my own little apartment.

I was surprised at his drawing me out, when I told him Louisa was with me, but she was not the person he chose to communicate to on that occasion.

Having entered my cell, he told me our household priest, though only slightly indisposed, had thrown up his deputyship, and taken to his bed declaring he had caught the infection, and was a dead man; that, in consequence of his sudden departure and Venols's attendance on the mother Abbess, he had been called upon to officiate in the chapel, was possessed of every private key, and doubted not but our hour of deliverance was at hand—

“But this is not all, said he; I am come to serve the young creature you and my Louisa so tenderly lament, if you can have the courage to assist me.”

“Oh! fear me not, cried I eagerly—only tell me the means, and if within my power to accomplish so benign a work, conclude it done.”

“One of the nuns, said he, that first fell ill, has this moment expired—let, then, the unhappy sister exchange cells with her, and her escape from a public and painful death is certain,

certain, though indeed there is no securing her from the danger of taking the fever ; but, situated as she is, I think she will not refuse to incur the hazard—I myself will convey the dead nun in my arms through the cloisters, and you must receive her, lay her on the mourning sister's bed, and wait my return from conducting the living to a place of safety ; for I must wound the departed in the side, that it may be believed she laid violent hands on herself—hasten therefore, good Madam, and persuade her to accept of this precarious deliverance.”—To sister Frances I went, and reported what I have written—she looked instantly on her child—You cannot hesitate, said I ; it is our duty to preserve our existence by every just means—Providence has raised you a friend—Your supposed illness will furnish you with the power of changing your complexion, and, by depriving yourself of those charms that have undone you, you will be effectually secured from every future outrage. Come give me your hand, and follow me—you shall thank me at our next meeting.”—So saying, I led her to Lord D——, who, having lodged her safely, soon brought the dead body to us : we disposed it according to his directions, and waited his return from sister Frances with much palpitation.

He did return—stabbed the miserable corpse in the side—and in about two hours time, having acquainted the Superior that Frances had killed herself, a shell was brought to put her in, muffled up in her cloaths, and alone and unattended, save by the bearers, Lord D. buried her,
together

together with the poor infant, without the convent walls.

Numbers who were to have been present at the dreadful scene of death, the execution of sister Frances, were much disappointed when the morning came to find that suicide had prevented the *legal* tragedy.—I stepped to the rescued nun, and told her all that had passed, when my Lord procuring a tincture for us, we dyed her skin, cut off her hair, and rendered it totally impossible for her ever to be known by the author of her misfortunes.

She lamented her infant was not more solemnly interred; but I soon convinced her that the dead could not suffer for any neglect of forms, and that she had now only to be thankful to the Being that had so miraculously preserved her.

Two nuns died last night of the fever, and many others are ill; but though the poor Frances went into the very cell and bed where a sister had expired of this epidemic disorder, she has hitherto escaped it, and, so soon as her recovery can with propriety be announced, will come forth sister Eliza, the name of her whose cell she now occupies.

Venols has furnished Louisa and myself with rue, wormwood, and all other plants said to be antidotes against infections—but whether it is owing to their virtue, or the peculiar favour of Heaven, we have not experienced one symptom of the disease.

Lord D—— and Venols, as no other Father will now visit us, have much fatigue in reading the prayers and burying the dead; but
they

they perform it all most chearfully, from the hope that it will end in some blessed scheme for our escape.

You need not let Niobe too much into the secret of his Lordship's goodness, as her heart is bent only too favourably towards him already.—Our Lady Abbess is better, though unable to leave her room.

I should, moreover, tell you, that our amiable Fathers act in the double capacity of of priest and physician, no member of the Faculty choosing to visit us, as, by visiting us, they would be excluded from all other practice — and the household Æsculapius is dead.—But this, it seems, is no unusual thing; for holy men take much pains to understand bodily as well as mental diseases, and are as well qualified to prescribe for the one as the other.—But still I see no opening for us—we must die, my Nancy, I fear, in this convent, and I shall never more have the happiness to behold you!

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER LIV.

From the Same to the Same.

MORE wonders! — At the conclusion of my last letter I felt myself ill, and on Lord D——'s visiting us complained much, though he assured me it could be only from a cold, or the fatigue I had undergone,
for

for that I had no one unfavourable symptom. I, however, went to bed early, and it was every where concluded I had taken the fever. I was the next day so unusually low-spirited, that I staid in my cell, though all without the least design of deceiving—but, when the second evening arrived, found, I had, unknowingly, been acting the preparatory part to my deliverance.

There are, you must understand, three or four boys belonging to every convent, who attend in the chapel, take care of the host, and perform or rather, perhaps, assist, in many of the church ceremonies, but are never admitted into the inhabited parts of the house, I mean those parts inhabited by the females.

One of these caught the fever the very day I fancied myself indisposed, and Lord D—— bid me hold myself in readiness to be exchanged for him, if the attack should prove mortal: “It will, said he, require much courage, and much caution—but I think you equal to the task, and shall therefore bring him, if he dies, immediately to your cell, and convey you to his cabin, where you shall receive from time to time instructions for your conduct.”

A tear started to Louisa’s eye — “Happy Maria! said she—I hope, at least, you will be happy, whatever fate attends me. To lose you is to lose life! health! treasure! every thing that is dear and valuable on earth!”

I felt every word she said thrill through my soul — She is, my Nancy, lovely, tender, amiable—but not our Niobe—Niobe would not, I am satisfied, have gone before me, but
heroically

heroically taken her chance for what might happen at the long-run in her favour, especially when she knew herself the object with the deliverer of her friend, who might have her doubts very naturally, if left behind; which was, I dare believe, the reason why Lord D——, on principles of generosity and delicacy, was glad of an opportunity of giving me the preference.

His Lordship, I was sorry for it, looked much disconcerted—"My beloved girl, said he, I should have thought of you in the first instance, if our Maria's indisposition had not pointed her out to me as the least suspected person; for you well know, though the illness is short, an illness does precede the *finale* of this calamity.—You, moreover, must recollect, that, when we had resolved to try our dormitory experiment, you insisted upon drawing lots, nor would accept the offered preference—You, Louisa, are certain of me—and"—there he stopt—She made him no reply, but wept abundantly.

"I am much indebted to your Lordship, said I, for this mark of your attention; but nothing is more easy than to report that our Louisa has caught the distemper—I will attend her, to preserve the secret; and, if the youth dies, with pleasure assist to the utmost of my power to effect her escape.—Staying behind has no terrors for me! I have long made up my mind to ending my life within these walls—and, should it prove the case, I will always remember your kind intention with gratitude, and rejoice in my friend's deliverance."

M

Lord

Lord D — bowed, and called me noble-minded woman — Louisa blushed, and insisted upon it I had mistaken her meaning, for that she wished to be left behind—I immediately advised her to go to her cell, and leave it to me to spread the report of her being seized by the contagion.

This Lord D—— absolutely protested against—“ No, Madam, said he, your friendship transports you too far—it is now believed you are ill, and we must cherish, not remove, that belief. Some, you know, die sooner than others, though the disease is the same—— Let Louisa, then, repair to her bed, and Venols and myself will do all the needful; we will nurse you both, and there is not a sister in the place but will rejoice to be excused the dangerous office.

I would have opposed this resolution, but my Lord was immoveable——“ I came here, it is true, said he, for my Louisa alone, but found her united in the strictest ties of amity with a lady who merits my regard, and I have bound myself to protect her. Shall I, Madam, be outdone in generosity, in perseverance, by a little girl!——Your Niobe has left you, in the fullest confidence, to my care, and I will either never see her more, or acquit myself to her satisfaction.”

“ Let me stay!” cried Louisa, bursting into tears.——“ Let me remain in this hateful house for ever!——Would you rescue me and enslave yourself?——Think not so meanly of
me

me, as to suppose I would go to England without you, which I find is your design for me to do, if you cannot deliver us both."

"We shall both of us be delivered, said I; so compose yourself, my sweet girl, and do every thing his Lordship directs. I can steal to you at midnight, receive the corpse, if the poor boy dies, and equip you for your change of situation——and may every good angel guard you!——I kissed her, Nancy, and we parted.

I am now, however, I acknowledge it, taking pains to excuse her conduct——I see and confess it is agreeable to human nature, and compatible with human friendship——We may love, we may esteem an object very sincerely, but when life or death, liberty or bondage, becomes the question, do not hesitate which to prefer, whatever exceptions a century may produce to the general rule.——
Love my Niobe,

and believe me to be, &c. &c.

MARIA.

M 2

LETTER

L E T T E R L V;

Lord D—— to Miss FREEMAN.

Madam,

POSSIBLY before you receive this letter, you will receive a most unexpected visitor—the beautiful Louisa is now at Dover, from whence it is uncertain whether she will proceed to London, or into the West of England, where she has a near relation, who she flatters herself will kindly receive her.

Miss Gerrard informs me she had made you acquainted with my scheme respecting the sick boy; I will therefore only tell you it succeeded to my wish:—but as the sweet girl was very unfit for carrying on the deception, I contrived to persuade our Superior it would be for the reputation of the convent to send a boy to England, in order to have masses and all other acts of devotion performed for us, to avert the calamity we laboured under.

This point settled, as she was a stranger to the country, and had never undertaken a journey in her life, the difficulty was how to get her to Calais. I myself would have conducted her, but being the house-priest, I could not,
with

with either propriety or safety, desert my office : Venols, therefore, being assistant only, formed a pretext to go to Calais, and offered to give the boy a cart in his chaise to the water-side. This also was happily effected, when putting her safe on board the packet, he left directions that the letter she promised to send him by its return, should be dispatched by a courier express to the convent—the letter is arrived, and I have the pleasure to inform you she is safe on the British side of this channel. A housekeeper of mine, who is married, and lives at Dover, will attend her wherever she pleases to command, and receive her under her care (and she is, by birth, a gentlewoman) the moment she disembarks ; so that all my fears respecting her are now, comparatively speaking, at an end.

I will now, Madam, confess to you my motive for troubling you with a letter, when I well know our Maria is writing one for me to convey to the post, containing a full and true account of every incident—But Miss Gerrard, Madam, has, I fear, no idea of cautioning you, if possible, to keep Miss Smith a stranger to her friend's unaccomplished escape.—She has such tender feelings, that the thought of her being left behind would throw her into despair of ever seeing her more, and involve her father and mother in her premature affliction.

Louisa is safe, for which I most unfeignedly thank Heaven ; but so greatly does Miss Gerrard deserve to be assisted, that I will never

quit this spot till I can make her the companion of flight. She is generously unhappy at my stay, but she knows little of my heart, to suppose it capable of rejoicing even with the woman I love, whilst she, who preserved that woman a thousand ways, and by a thousand hazards, is languishing in confinement. Your Niobe, Madam, would blush for me if I could; for she has all that true greatness of soul that does honour to human nature.

I shall now be quite satisfied — the way is always open to me — and the lovely Louisa has been essentially served by me. There is, indeed, nothing wanting to fill up the measure of my felicity, but being able to present Miss Gerrard to her valuable friends, which would be to wipe the tears for ever from her Niobe's eyes, and give you, Madam, unspeakable happiness.

I am, with much esteem, your, &c.

D——

LETTER

L E T T E R LVI.

Miss FREEMAN to Miss GERRARD.

O MY unhappy friend ! what have you done ?—sacrificed yourself and every one that loves you : for an unfeeling, an ungrateful girl—Yes, Maria, she is both unfeeling and ungrateful, for she has written me a letter full of lamentations for the loss of her lover, and only cold regrets where you are concerned.—For my part, I hope I shall never see her so long as I live.

Our Niobe knows nothing of Louisa's arrival in England, nor do I intend to torture her generous breast unnecessarily—Lord D. will not forsake you, and Heaven, I think, will reward his constancy in the cause of justice, humanity, and friendship.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith would be compleatly happy, if it was not for the sighs that involuntarily escape their beloved child, *all* which are placed to your account :—but I fear Lord D. has, at least his *share* in them, notwithstanding the proofs you have received of her unexampled affection.

That Niobe loves Lord D. you will easily credit—but what if I should take upon me to affirm that Lord D. loves our Niobe—you would, I doubt not, think me insane.—To be true, however, to my sex, and *blab* the secret I am intrusted with—read the enclosed letter, and if you do not find the marks strong upon him—if that does not convince you, I

will shew you another *epistle* when we are so happy as to meet, which breaths the genuine spirit of tenderness and attachment.

This my Maria, I apprehend to be the case—he loves Louisa's person, but adores Miss Smith's mind; and he shall have her mind, body, fortune, and ten thousand thanks into the bargain, if he *does* perfectly recover the use of his reason, and can prefer a permanent to a temporary treasure.

However, if you can pardon this Louisa's conduct, I suppose I must behave civil to her; (but take my word for it, she will never be Lady D.) and that is all I can undertake to bring my mind to; for it is plain she would have taken away her lover and left you for ever immured in that abominable mansion.—Thus goodness of heart never fails of its reward, nor will our Niobe have wept in vain.

Mrs Ashley thinks, exactly as I do both of the Lady's demerits, and the gentleman's merits; and our sweet little friend, all unconscious of her own charms, expects to receive the news of Lord D's. marriage, the same hour she hears of your deliverance.—I shall offend you if I write more, and will therefore only add, that

I am, &c. &c.

ANN FREEMAN.

LETTER LVII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

YOU have surpris'd me most agreeably, I cannot deny it, by the discovery you have made of Lord D.'s affection for my own Niobe.—Yet how slyly he carries it, seldom or never mentions her name, or, indeed, his Louisa, since her departure; but that I impute to his singular complaisance for me, who am still as close a prisoner as ever, without——

Some body taps at my door, so adieu for the present.

* * * * *

It was Mr. Venols, my Nancy, who came to acquaint me another boy is ill, though the contagion is greatly abated, and that my Lord as well as himself intreats me to hold myself in readiness to take his place.

My heart—ah! my good girl, my heart beats heavily on the occasion; for how can I with the death of an innocent, perhaps an amiable youth, who may be the prop of his father and mother's age, the darling of their bosoms—Yet there is not another chance for me on earth for escaping these walls.

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* * * *

The youth is worse ; nay, not expected to live over the night—How shall I contain myself, how reconcile my conscience to these rejoicings in the distress of a fellow-creature ! He must die, Nancy, if I am to live.—It is the will of Heaven, and he would have fallen a victim to this disease, though I had never been born.

We are, it seems, to remain a short time on the spot, after I have changed my sex, as my Lord cannot throw up his office until some one is found willing to accept it ; and to fly would create suspicion, and we should fail in our great attempt.

Nancy ! Nancy ! how shall I bear the felicity of beholding you !—how return the congratulations of my Niobe and Mrs. Ashley !—how engage you to forgive the poor Louisa ! But forgive her you must ; and remember, my dear, she has been the instrument in the hands of Providence of bringing me back to life and you, if such a blissful event is in store for me.

A tap—Heavens ! whence this tremor, this mortal chilling ?—Am I—am I—I come ! I come !

* * * *

The poor youth is dead, Nancy ! nor can I have the presumption, the impiety to think
he

he died for me ; therefore shall look upon the incident in its true light, as the common casualty of human existence, and make my innocent advantage of it.

He is to be conveyed to my cell, and I must have the courage to receive him. Thus, then, my Nancy, the bands are broken, the passage is free, and we shall meet again.

Lord D. thinks it best we should leave the convent, under pretence of going to Rome, to have Te-Deums sung on the recovery of two thirds of the sick, and the cessation of the contagion ; for the poor youth, whose place I am this night to take, is the last that caught the fever : and as such sort of steps abundantly advances the reputation of religious houses, there is no doubt but she will applaud the thought, and most readily give into it.

Soft !—I hear a noise——Should Lord D. be met by any one—but the convent is deserted for the present by all the holy spies, and no person else would dare to question him.——Again I start !——I am distressed beyond description or endurance——He is here !—(kiss, Nancy, kiss this blessed line of my letter)—and I am now about to quit my cell and the convent for ever !

Your, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

LETTER LVIII.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

A Whole week has now elapsed since I became a sacristan, or something very little inferior to it; and Venols, under pretence of having received letters from his boy, which require his immediate and personal answer, is set off for England. Our Lady mother did not at all relish this expedition; but as she has still an ulcer in her throat, which makes her perfect recovery doubtful, is now in a part of the house where she can receive only holy or friendly visits, and the rogue promised to return in a fortnight at most, she at length consented, and he, by this time, possibly, kisses your hands in my name; for I am assured his first visit will be to you, and I need not repeat here how I wish he should be received.

I will tell you, Nancy, why I am more particularly anxious you should regard Venols with a favourable eye—He is a man of extraordinary merit, though small fortune, and of English extraction, and a protestant, though born in France. I have had time to call this frail heart of mine to account, and find the
 VOW

vow I have entered into cannot be dissolved by my quitting these walls; nay, so far from it, that, in thankfulness for the astonishing mercy, it ought, by the very circumstance of my escape, to be trebly confirmed. What I therefore called love must become friendship. You are the sister of my tenderest affection; make him, then, your husband, and my tenderness for him will be sanctified. I protest to you I will never be his, or any man's living, but, the pure glowings of amity abstracted, devote myself wholly to my divine deliverer.

Not one impediment stands in the way so soon as Lord D. can get a successor; and I am so docile in my new office, so dexterous, so diligent, that I am equally unsuspected as unknown for other than I am, except by my immediate master,—the liberal-minded and worthy nobleman to whom I am indebted for all the peace of mind I now enjoy, and all the pleasure I promise myself in the sweet society of my female friends.

But what surprises me exceedingly is, that Louisa has not once written to the convent, except the letter that returned with the packet which conveyed her to England; but it must be the fear of doing wrong, where she would wish to do right, that alone restrains her; for however she could neglect me, who *shone* for once at her expence, my Lord, in return for his months and months of assiduity, must have a tender interest in her heart.

We are to go to Louisa before we visit London—

don—This, I presume, will be no violence to any of *us*, as only a week ago you would have thought it a glorious condition of our reunion—But be assured I will write to you the moment I set my feet on English ground.

Yet how am I to live? for I think I ought not to cast myself on Louisa's bounty after what has passed. My heart answers, without one proud pang, I will be the happy pensioner of my beloved Niobe and my Nancy, nor will I ever ask a superior provision from heaven.

My Lord is now gone to enquire for a holy brother who is said to be arrived in the neighbourhood, and has already declared himself impatient to attend a summons from Rome, to which place his boy has a strange ambition to accompany him, to behold the holy see, &c. &c. and as he is a good boy, he will indulge him.—Thus, you see, how near I am to launching on the ocean I had sworn.

You must observe, that what has facilitated my escape is, that all who have died of this fever, in order to check the infection, have been huddled hastily into a coffin, and interred without other enquiry than the nurse's testimony, or other examination than what has been left to the priests.

My next letter, I trust, will be from Italy, not France, though we shall only touch on the frontiers, and then strike into the rout which will bring us to England. I will, then, no longer conclude with my everlasting adieus,
but

but in the full-blown hope of meeting you in a short time in London,

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER LIX.

Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.

Turin,

WITH what extacy do I date my letter from hence! though travelling in this part of the world is incommodious in every respect. — My Lord has taken great pains to soften my fatigues; but I was so eager to get out of the French King's dominions, that I would scarcely be prevailed upon to sleep away my precious hours at any town we passed through. We shall stay here a day or two only, and then, instead of advancing towards the south, strike off into Germany, from thence to Holland, and embark at Helvoetsluys for Harwich, where my Lord has begged of Venols that a letter may meet him, to tell whether his Louisa is in town or country.

Are we not over-paid, Nancy, for all our solicitude by this gracious indulgence of Providence?

vidence? and to Providence be the praise! for no human art or wisdom could have delivered us; though my simple idea always was, that spirit, invention, and gold, were the master-keys to every convent on earth.

Lord D. insists upon my laying down my pen, on pain of having you informed how untractable I am—ungovernable I suppose he means—in the article of taking proper repose; and declares that he will lock up all my epistolary apparatus, until I am safely landed in Britain, when I shall cease to be his charge, and consequently must live to my own choice.—I can therefore only add, that

I am your happy, happy

MARIA.

LETTER

LETTER LX.

*Miss GERRARD to Miss FREEMAN.**Harwich,*

HERE we are, my dear ! and here we have received information from Venols that Louisa is down in the country with her aunt. There is a somewhat of the mysterious in his stile that does not seem to strike my Lord ; but I am mistaken, if Louisa is the Louisa we used to find her.

A chaise is ordered for to-morrow morning, and I cannot refuse accompanying this generous nobleman in his visit to his fair mistress, though my heart is in London. But we must be content ; light evils ought to be lightly born, especially by those that have experienced what you and I, my Nancy have.—We shall soon meet, never more to part.—Lord D. is the kindest, best of men ; but, I fear, will not be all you wish him. I resumed my female dress at Turin ; but though you will find me *en etrangere* in my appearance, my mind is English and wholly yours—and yours—and yours.—You will add the names of our Niobe and Mrs. Ashley to the
above

above, and let them see my remembrance of them.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

P. S. Venols thinks you are an angel.

L E T T E R L X I.

From the Same to the Same.

WE reached Louisa's, my Nancy, at six this evening, and found her sitting at work with a most pleasing and venerable lady, who rose to bid us welcome.

I threw my arms with undissembled affection around her neck, but had the mortification to find my salute coldly received; and looking with much ill-humour on my Lord, "You are come then at last, Sir!" said she.

"And have I not," said he, "brought my *apology* in my hand. O Madam, turning to the old lady, nothing but my resolution to stay behind could have saved this amiable woman,
(meaning

(meaning me,) and best of friends, from being lost."

"I applaud your noble behaviour, said the old lady, and really wonder on what grounds my niece can disapprove it.—Lovers, continued she, may have quarrels; but friends must rejoice in every worthy step their friends take, though at the price of some little self-denial. I have too good an opinion of Louisa, to suppose she can consider any man in the light of a lover."

Here a very warm and a very sensible conversation took place;—my Lord, with much address, though he had evidently the worse side of the argument, defending his tenet, the lady condemning it. "Vows, said she, according to my poor idea, have nothing to do with locality.—It was not necessary my niece, for example, should remain in the hot-bed of vice, because she had devoted herself to heaven; but, be assured, if she can think she is at liberty, in consequence of her escape from her horrid prison, to break her covenant with God—I shall regret we ever met, as we must, on such a contingency, part to meet no more.—My Lord begged to wave the subject, which was the next thing to giving up the point; and Louisa, bursting into tears, hastily left the room.

I followed her, and found her not my Louisa.—She detested my Lord, she said, for his fickle turn of mind; nor was she such a novice as not to perceive how easily he gave her up to the rigid notions her aunt entertained.—

But

But I was the cause of all ; and she should have been happy, if she had never seen my face.

I disdained the thought of vindicating myself from so illiberal an aspersión ; but seeing Lord D. advance towards us (for we were in the garden), I besought him to do justice to his own and my character, in few words mentioning the charge.

Having heard what Louisa had more to offer on the subject, (and she was, my dear, very communicative,)—" No, Madam, replied he, you wrong both this lady and me—for since I find it impossible to obtain the honour of your hand, Miss Smith is too deservedly and too highly the object of my esteem to be forgot by me ; nor shall it be my fault if her noble-mindedness does not make me amends for the loss of your *beauty*.

This last word he pronounced with a particular emphasis—then turning to me, " I am sorry, Madam," said he, " on your account, to find, after so long a journey, we are unwelcome guests ; but you must be humble enough to take up with the accommodations of an inn, until I can convey you safely to London. I must not kill you with fatigue, the moment I have been so happy as to raise you from the grave."

Mrs. Finnette, Louisa's aunt, now joined us, and vehemently opposed our leaving her house while we were unable to renew our journey—but though she found me yielding as air, my Lord consented with a very ill grace, declaring

claring it was wholly and solely on my account, and from the apprehensions of throwing me, through want of repose, into a fever—and thus, my Nancy, did our romance terminate.

I am now in a solitary apartment, though under the same roof with that Louisa who could not exist without me in the convent.—Jealousy ! how baneful a thing thou art, and how odious dost thou make the female heart appear, which should be all gentleness, generosity, and delicacy !

Good night, my beloved girl—the interval will be short between your receiving this and our happy, our long-despaired-of re-union. I greet all our friends with the most tender affection, and sigh that Louisa is no longer of that number.

I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

LETTER

L E T T E R LXII.

From Lord D—— to Miss FREEMAN.

Madam,

ONCE more I do myself the honour to address you.—Louisa is still as beautiful as ever; but beauty of person alone is too slender a foundation for a man of even common understanding to venture to build his happiness upon; and as all connection between us is most unexpectedly dissolved, I now presume to look up to the only woman on earth I ever yet met with, compleatly accomplished.

I always esteemed *your* Little Niobe—her lively innocent chat delighted me; her resemblance of Louisa made me admire her, and her greatness of mind, on a further acquaintance, taught me to revere her: but, Madam, I never suspected I loved her, until the night I watched by her bed-side, and, in the violence of her fever, unconscious of what she did, she sweetly whispered her love of me.

“It is all over, said she, pressing my hand for yours—I can even rejoice in the idea of seeing him Louisa’s husband—He loves her as tenderly

tenderly as I love him—and my heart is free from all the selfishness that enables one person to be happy at the expence of another—but, surely, it cannot be unworthy the purity of the purest mind, to be pleased with the esteem of a man of sense, generosity, and goodness;” (for such her partiality painted me)—“Yes, he esteems me, Madam, and I exult in his esteem—nor shall he ever discover the weak-ness of a poor girl who never knew a preference before, and would die rather than dishonour her father, mother, or herself, in any respect.—Hush, cried she, make no reply—my heart feels not a truer or more becoming affection for our Maria, than for Lord D. She is my sister, and he shall be my brother—I may wish, perhaps, I had never been so situated, for his agreeable conversation to be the only pleasure within my reach, as that, and that alone, proved the poison—but the world will expel it, and I shall meet him with such affections only as angels may take cognisance of.”

Much more did she utter in this sweet style of incoherence—and I listened with astonishment, with admiration—so young a creature, capable of conquering herself on principles of honour and delicacy!—I was flattered by her approbation of me, and sighed that her mind was not Louisa’s.

From that hour I have felt a painful tenderness for Miss Smith, and have only remained Louisa’s admirer; but conceiving my honour entangled,

entangled, I resolved to fulfil my engagements, whatever it cost me.

I am now, however, a *rejected* lover, and at liberty to offer myself to any condescending fair one that can pardon a prior attachment.—Miss Smith has too noble a way of thinking, not to enter entirely into the meaning of my conduct. What I would intreat, therefore, Madam, of you is, to report me, as nearly as you are able, what I now am in every respect, and make this dear girl a proper tender of my affections ; ask her permission to apply in my name to Mr. and Mrs. Smith for their sanction to address her, and make me, by your interest with her and them, the happiest of men.

But the little secret, Madam, this letter contains, must not be disclosed until I may be authorised to call your Niobe mine, and can mention the circumstance to her without paining her delicacy, or occasioning her one repentant sigh.

I have only to add, that I want no fortune, but her numberless graces and perfections.—My estate is considerable, and by my mode of living, for some time past, I have a large sum of money on my hands ; but I could wish Mr. Smith to compliment his daughter with five thousand pounds for her separate use ; that this amiable girl may have it in her power to make our Maria independent without my assistance ; and as she is resolved never to marry, I hope to reconcile her good sense and good-nature to accepting an annuity from her little friend,
which

which will revert on her decease to my family.

I rely on your prudence, your generosity, to effect every desired purpose of my heart with all the soft attention Miss Smith's nice sensibility is intitled to ; for I shall not, Madam, dare to appear before her, as an assured, but a petitioning lover ; and I refer you to Miss Gerrard for every necessary confirmation of my extraordinary discharge from my former *mistress*.

I am, with all due regard, &c. &c.

D—.

LETTER LXIII.

Miss GERRARD to *Mr.* VENOLS.

Sir,

I HAVE the pleasure to tell you every thing is at length *en train* for our Niobe's and Lord D—'s nuptuals—the sweet girl had
N her

her hesitations, her delicacies; but a report reaching us that Louisa was gone off with a young Ensign in a marching regiment—a report which was, on enquiry, confirmed—she offered her hand in her peculiar manner to the delighted Lord D——, telling him, that what she wanted in beauty, should, if possible, be attoned by her good-humour and attention to his happiness. “I see,” added she, smiling, “you have already won the hearts of my father and mother—and that, I promise you, is no inconsiderable step to winning mine. Maria, too, will be made happy by my owning that I am sensible of your great merit.” He kissed her yielded hand; and Mr. Smith, being told what had passed, has fixed on the very next week for their union. But take notice, though I am to live occasionally with you all—my Niobe’s parental roof is to be my established home—Mrs. Ashley is to live with Lady D——.

But, perhaps, you will not enter into the spirit of all this good news, because I have not yet told you how your own important affair stands; but believe me, Venols, too much do I esteem you to be capable of trifling, if every thing was not to your wish—My dear Nancy has owned you are the man of her choice, and Mr. Freeman declares he shall be proud of his son-in-law—Dispatch, therefore, your rural business as soon as possible, and instead of superintending the culture or improvement

ment of a few dirty acres, come and claim the happiness that awaits you.

It appears that Louisa formed an acquaintance with the young fellow she has taken for her husband, in her passage from France, and, on Lord D——'s house-keeper attending, according to his Lordship's commands, she was surprised to find her deeply engaged in a conversation with a spark who had rendered himself very conspicuous by his frolics in the neighbourhood of Dover, where his corps was quartered, one of which was, this very trip to Calais which brought him to the knowledge of the fugitive devotee. Louisa, who had been little accustomed to the company of the men, was much flattered by the court this red-coat paid to her, who was, take notice, master of such irresistible eloquence, that, in three hours time, he unlocked her heart of all its secrets, and, as he now boasts, jockeyed his Lordship out of his chance, by the mere dint of representing him a luke-warm, a contemptible lover, for outstaying her on any occasion, and exposing her to the attacks of a whole army of new admirers.

I am concerned, however, for her conduct, especially as I am told her aunt has cast her off; but it is unanimously agreed upon by this knot of friends, nor are you, Venols, left out of the catalogue, that she shall never want a decent pecuniary support so long as you all live; though it shall be so conveyed, as to conceal, for ever, the source from whence it is derived. Come, I once more repeat it, to

London with all expedition, nor waste too much time on any farming business—any business that is of less importance than your happy union with the woman you love, and the only woman, believe me, (nor do I hesitate to affirm it,) that can, that does deserve you—for you are a most valuable member of society; and

I am, the first,

and most affectionate

of your friends,

MARIA.

LETTER

LETTER LXIV.

Miss GERRARD to Mrs. ASHLEY.

Dear Mrs. Ashley,

TELL our beloved Lady D. that Venols and his wife (late my sweet Ann Freeman), Mr. Freeman, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and her Maria, intend dining with her on Monday next. Her Lord will, I suppose, have the gallantry to give us the meeting at the half-way house; but if her Ladyship has *any* better engagement, she will be excused paying that compliment to so *outré* a party as *loving* relations and *sincere* friends. You, my good Madam, may possibly be induced to bear my Lord company, as you always had a turn for rational scenes, and a taste for social felicity.—Need I add how much

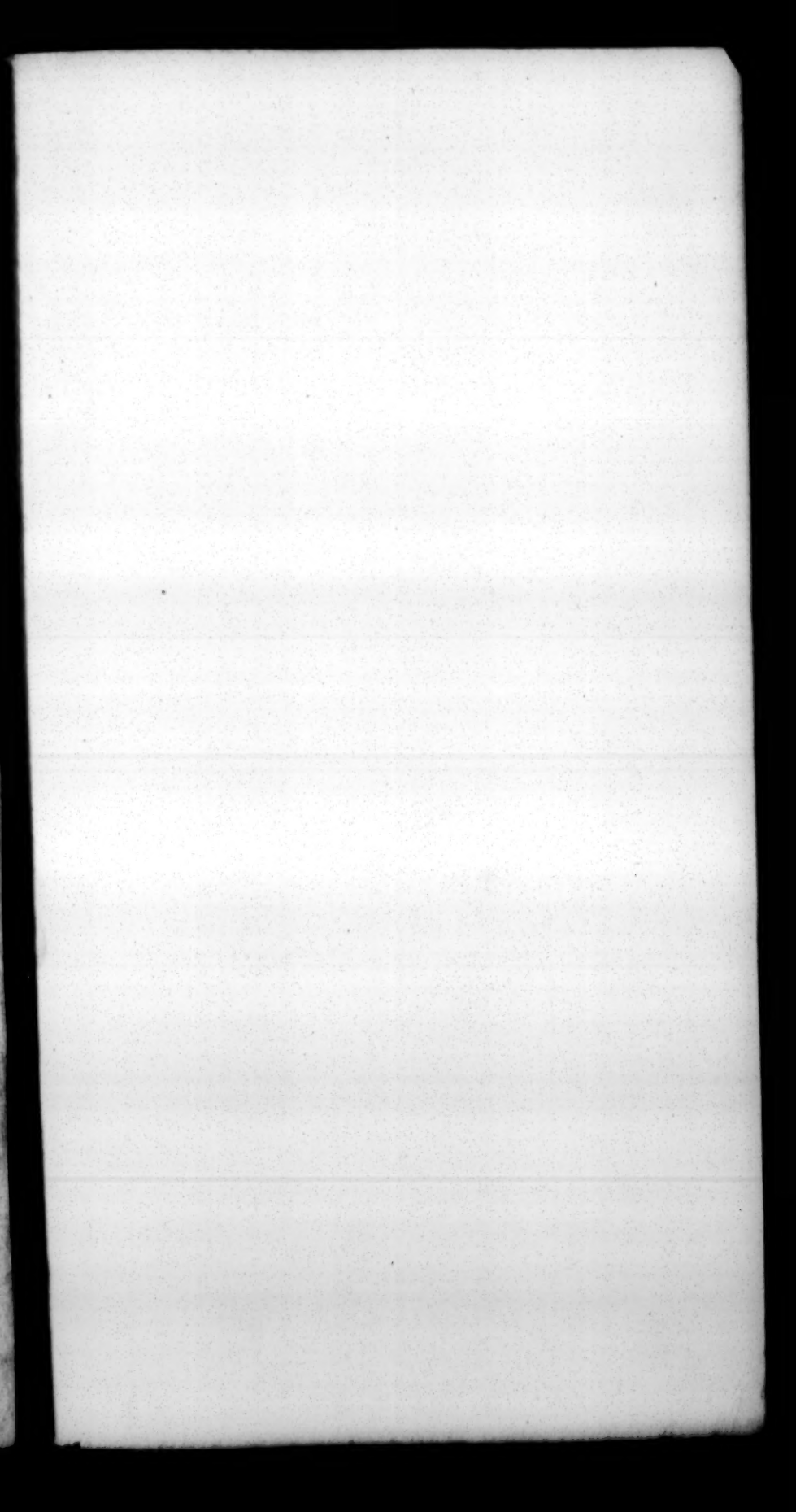
I am, &c. &c.

MARIA.

F I N I S.

Pro. A.





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